

Country Update

The Status of Circular Economy in the Gambia

By Manav Kapadia

Introduction

A circular economy, demarcated by its climate-friendly and sustainable nature towards development, has been characterized as one of the most important avenues for economic growth. The Gambian Government (TGG), through its leading agency for the environment, the National Environment Agency (NEA) is responsible for promoting a circular economy and accelerating sustainable growth. Consumption in the Gambia is 45% circular¹, notably due to the increased usage of renewable products in daily lives. However, continued efforts to move away from linearity in production-consumption processes have just started. Moreover, concerns remain in adopting circularization in industrial and manufacturing units, which continue to grow in the country.

A close look at the policy framework towards a more circular economy

The plastic production and consumption in market processes grew to 7.82 billion tonnes in 2015 compared to 80 million tonnes in 1963², demonstrating plastic usage at an uncontrollable pace. The growth rate is alarming and strikes the

need for policy action, mitigation measures and increased involvement of the private sector and consumers to reduce plastic usage.

The government has specifically tackled plastics with several legislative and other policy measures. The 2015 ban on plastic importation, sale and use achieved important successes relatively in consumer awareness. Moreover, plastics reduction has been incorporated into NEA's action plan for 2019-2022 to strengthen further policy implementation.

In addition to using legislative measures to tackle the plastic problem and leverage more circular value chains, NEA has carried out other plans. For example, the plan to enhance private-public partnerships and provide an "enabling environment for private sector involvement"³ is carried under the Strategic Plan (2019-2022) under the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Natural Resources. It is precisely thought to be carried out by encouraging large scale reuse of plastic materials in industrial processes⁴. The goal would be to involve as many as businesses as possible⁵. It is crucial that for the policy structure to achieve desired benefits, it must promote participation from actors from multiple sectors, geographies and social backgrounds. For this, the government has allotted \$150,000,000 for three years⁶, to encourage consultations and involve public companies in

¹Touray, Katim (2020), Circular GHG Mitigation in The Gambia: a system's approach for the shifting paradigms. Available at <https://shiftingparadigms.nl/projects/gambia/>

²Babayemi, Joshua (2019), Ensuring sustainability in plastics use in Africa: consumption, waste generation, and projections for Environmental Sciences Europe. Available at <https://enveurope.springeropen.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s12302-019-0254-5.pdf>

³Strategic Plan (2019-2022), MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT,

CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURAL RESOURCES (MECCNAR). Available at

<https://meccnar.gov.gm/sites/default/files/2021-06/MINISTRY%20OF%20ENVIRONMENT%20CLIMATE%20CHANGE%20%26%20NATURAL%20RESOURCES%20STRATEGIC%20PLAN%202019-2022.pdf>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

plastic re-usage⁷. It has a huge potential to create employment in rural regions wherein the plastic is dumped and has a strong multiplier effect on the general economy.

Apart from plastic, TGG has promoted circular economy processes in other sectors like agriculture and waste management. They have made use of fiscal and other tools to enhance government response. The Gambian economy, mostly agrarian, may present immense potential for exploring efficient and sustainable aspects of improving productive yield. The role of the government is critical to ensure sustainable access to resources, re-skilling and creating awareness in the society.

TGG has targeted plastic production and consumption in agriculture, along with the common goal of reforestation on barren lands. The TGG has carried out the multi-strata agroforestry policy since 2016 with coordination between the government, FAO and community organizations⁸. Under this project, farming shall be under a dense forest canopy, which allows the circularization of natural resources. In addition, the Gambia has one of the lowest fertilizer consumption rates globally⁹, and agroforestry can bring natural fertilizers to use. While it proves advantageous on multiple fronts, it most importantly improves response to droughts and food insecurity, enabling usage of barren land for reforestation and using it for crop harvesting and other materials, which lead to job creation. Agroforestry can improve productive yield, and at the same time, make other products in the forest open to business, such as timber.

Complementing agroforestry, the government has initiated action against unplanned waste disposal. TGG has invited consultancies for drawing plans for

waste management¹⁰. The local authorities in Banjul have obtained equipment from Spain to begin segregation of organic waste to produce compost for gardening¹¹. While this may not tackle the waste management issue holistically, it has introduced to the State the concept of waste segregation and circular economy concerning household rubbish. TGG, under its Gaining Research Experience in Africa for Tomorrow (GREAT) Institute since 2018, has organized regular beach clean-ups and driven media campaigns to challenge citizens from not using plastic during "plastic-free days"¹².

The economic effects of turning waste into the fertilizer can be immense, concerning the availability of fertilizers, employment, and enhancing output towards agricultural development. Currently, authorities in Banjul and other NGOs are involved in compost making. However, the government has shown interest in expanding the compost making abilities. Moreover, the import of fertilizers in the Gambia has fallen drastically since 2018¹³, resulting in shortages. Thus, establishing the compost making policy in multiple regions and cities of the country can avail additional output and open up new supply chains for a high-demand market in the agrarian country. However, it is subject to credit available to farmers for fertilizers, education to the farmers on benefits and designing cost-effective fertilizers from the organic waste.

The government has also revised and extended its original Gambia National Agricultural Investment Plan (GNAIP) of 2010-2015 to GNAIP 2019-2026. Under the auspices of this plan, the government has included water retention strategies in farming¹⁴. Water retention is critical for rice farming. The government has intended to develop infrastructure under the GNAIP 2026 to allow farmers to reuse

⁷United Nations Development Programme (2021). Circular GHG mitigation opportunities in The Gambia - A metabolic approach to defining a resource efficient and low-carbon future, UNDP, New York.

⁸Mazzini, Anna (2018), HOW THE GAMBIA LEARNED TO GROW BOTH FORESTS AND FOOD. Available at <https://www.ozy.com/around-the-world/how-the-gambia-learned-to-grow-both-forests-and-food/85593/>

⁹World Bank Data (2020), Fertilizer consumption (kilograms per hectare of arable land) - Gambia, The. Available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.CON.FERT.ZS?locations=GM>

¹⁰African Development Bank Group (2020), EOI - Gambia - Waste management study & Landfill design Consultancy - CSRWASHDEP. Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/eoi-gambia-waste-management-study-landfill-design-consultancy-csrwashdep>

¹¹Magoum, Ines (2021), GAMBIA: An organic waste management project is launched in Greater Banjul. Available at <https://www.afrik21.africa/en/gambia-an-organic-waste-management-project-is-launched-in-greater-banjul/>

¹²Touray, Katim (2020), Circular GHG Mitigation in The Gambia: a system's approach for the shifting paradigms. Available at <https://shiftingparadigms.nl/projects/gambia/>

¹³Trading Economics, (2021), Gambia Import of Fertilizers. Available at

<https://tradingeconomics.com/gambia/imports/fertilizers>

¹⁴Second Generation National Agricultural Investment Plan-Food and Nutrition Security (GNAIP II-FNS) (2019), The Government of Gambia. Available at https://www.gafspfund.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/7.%20The%20Gambia%20Investment%20Plan%20%282019-2026%29_1.pdf

water from excessive flooding in the nearby rivers and lakes. It will be done by developing infrastructure in valleys and swamps to enable farmers to reuse water and circularise essential minerals¹⁵. Thus, the water during rainfall can be effectively preserved and be used at a later stage for sediment retention. These measures can allow for combatting water issues, as well as circularise important minerals for agriculture. The local economy can benefit from the development of irrigation and water retention systems. The water is reused in the local areas and reduces costs of transporting water to the farms.

Along with agriculture, the government has used fiscal tools to increase incentives on circularization and recycling. These fiscal tools include partial public guarantees and tax rebates on businesses promoting circularization, SDGs and recycling¹⁶. The partial public guarantees may be critical steps to support innovation in circularization and financially support MSMEs. These guarantees can encourage firms to borrow money for investments and benefit the circular flow of income. At the same time, tax rebates ensure that institutions are more incentivized to circularize their production. They allow for greater entrepreneurship and stimulate competition in the circular sector. The incentivization may also be essential to restart green choices amongst businesses.

In addition to the fiscal tools, TGG in the National Entrepreneurship Policy Draft prepared with assistance from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) outlines additional policies to support circularization and the SDGs. It is mainly by setting up equity co-investment schemes, allowing large investor groups to invest in businesses and avoid other fees by equity managers¹⁷. While this policy has been limited to waste, energy and water supply sectors¹⁸, it can incentivize formalization more broadly. Along with formalization, innovation may increase and engage green development in the rural and urban areas of the country. In the long run, this may be efficient to attract large flows of investment in these specific

sectors and boost circularization.

However, TGG, unlike some other governments in Africa, does not have a specific national circular economic policy in place. Along with a robust national policy, there also remains a need for constant support to the citizenry and the market forces to ensure the existing frameworks and efforts are sustained. At the same time, new consultations must be held with various stakeholders to create an effective policy.

A close look at the potential opportunities and challenges for circularity

Circular processes enable businesses to access new markets and develop innovation to use additional capital in their supply chains. In the case of the Gambia, where the circular economy push is in its early stages, it has demonstrated some key challenges and opportunities to leverage the opportunities from circularisation. These challenges and opportunities exist for multinationals, MSMEs, and informal economy actors to turn toward more circular processes.

Opportunities

A circular economy presents a multitude of advantages for developing countries like the Gambia. Multinational companies are in particularly advantageous position as they may source capital for production from several regions/countries. Pushing circularization initiatives in MNCs operating in the Gambia can enhance the acquisition by them of products made from wastes by local businesses. Cement industry is a good example of that.

According to a market study, the cement industry in the Gambia purchases many of its raw materials from foreign producers¹⁹. Further, this industry is

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶NATIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP POLICY DRAFT (2016), The Gambia. Available at https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/qpr/national_entrepreneurship_policy.pdf

¹⁷Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹Gambia, The- Country Commercial Guide (2020), US Department of Commerce. Available at <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/gambia-construction>

dominated by a few firms, who cannot meet local cement demands²⁰. Thus, the country remains a major importer of cement²¹. Circularisation in this sector may involve reusing the demolished concrete for building the roads²². Circularization could enable MNCs to reuse concrete, use domestic firms for processing demolished concrete and reduce reliance on importation. On a micro-economic level, this i) may benefit the company's commitments to corporate social responsibility, and ii) in the case of the cement industry can help the firm make extra profits or be liable for benefits from the government for correcting externalities from their production. Tax rebates and investment opportunities offered by circularization may make it more incentive for MNCs to become more sustainable. Moreover, foreign firms may enter the market if the consumer demand remains strong enough to purchase CE goods and if the environment remains conducive to profitability for production. Circularization can enable sourcing products locally, strengthening overall value chains in the country, and responding to a greener approach to construction.

● *Green Recovery and COVID-19*

The scope of the pandemic and the concurrent socio-economic impacts have allowed rebuilding greener. While the Gambia has relatively swiftly handled the pandemic, the complementing closures of the tourism industry have born heavy losses to the economy. In addition to tourism, heavy losses have been suffered by informal businesses. However, the government has reportedly recorded greater rainfall and agricultural output and an increase in remittances.

It is crucial to try a fast and sustainable recovery of the tourism sector. The recovery strategy and plans for this sector should be conceived with circularity in mind which will be a substantial opportunity to rebuild better and greener.

● *Formalization of Environmental Parks and Businesses*

Increasing the formalization of environmental parks and protected areas can bear the benefits of formalization. Enforcement of environmental standards can enable tourists, industries, the local economy and most important ecological hotspots to co-exist. The circularization of resources in the plantations like grass, fresh soil and water can enable the hotel industries to flourish without excessive investment and even benefit from government planning²³. Most importantly, the tourists can enjoy the greenery and wildlife at lower prices due to circularization. At the same time, the local economy can benefit the local workforce and resources. It enables a holistic, sustainable green recovery.

● *Sustainable and Circular Transport*

To promote circularization, TGG must strengthen transportation and connectivity. The current transport is marked by a series of cruises on River Gambia, which often have recorded large discharges of effluents from the vehicle into the river²⁴. It may be due to the usage of outdated engines²⁵. Thus to promote circularization and green-recovery, the government must invest in new engine capacity, preventing environmental degradation. New machines must be purchased in a way that the parts can be recycled once used. It can benefit the environment, make Gambian transport and tourism high-tech and attractive, and reduce regular servicing.

Challenges

Considering the above opportunities and advantages associated with the circularisation, there remain significant barriers in the Gambian economy to achieve them.

²⁰Cement Market Study (2018), The Gambia Competition and Consumer Protection Commission. Available at <https://gcc.gm/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CEMENT-MARKET-STUDY.pdf>

²¹Ibid

²²Circular Economy, Global Cement and Concrete Association. Available <https://gccassociation.org/sustainability-benefits-of-concrete/circular-economy/>

²³Taylor, Michael (2021), 4 ways nature tourism can help drive a green COVID-19 recovery for the World Economic Forum. Available at [https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/nature-](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/nature-tourism-green-recovery-investment/)

[tourism-green-recovery-investment/](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/nature-tourism-green-recovery-investment/).

²⁴UNEP, National Status Report Coastal and Marine Environment of The Gambia. Available at <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/10420/National%20Status%20Report%20Coastal%20and%20Marine%20Environment%20Gambia.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

²⁵Movinon Summit (2021), 4 EXAMPLES OF CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN TRANSPORTATION. Available at <https://summit.movinonconnect.com/2021/03/17/4-examples-of-circular-economy-in-transportation/>

The informal economy in the Gambia is predominantly based on craft and trade-related jobs followed by services and sales²⁶. Circularization in these sectors can be tricky since handcrafts may use products derived from cultural and indigenous importance. Usage of other items to produce the end-product may essentially make their business non-competitive. Moreover, circularization concerning waste-management in the informal sector may involve structural unemployment, as machines may take over the roles of human rag-pickers to segregate and process waste for compost or other activities²⁷. Solid waste management through human means provides a livelihood for the poorest sections of the society in the LDCs. Hence, a structural change in bringing circularization may disturb the local economies and employment.

Lastly, concerning MNCs in the Gambia, circularization may impact investment plans for the future. For example, the circularization efforts may demand new machinery and additional capital. Further, this can be associated with high training costs and guaranteeing the safety of consumers while using recycled products, which can be difficult²⁸. The monetary costs associated with circularization may make companies move out of the country. Moreover, the undeveloped regulatory and institutional frameworks governing the circularization²⁹ can potentially extend administrative expenses and make it difficult for companies to manufacture in the country.

All of these challenges mostly emanate from the potential costs of moving towards more circularity, and hence point to the need to greater financial resources that the international community should endeavour to provide.

Private sector measures and initiatives

The private sector's involvement in the promotion of circular economy in the Gambia is most valued. Specifically, the **textiles & construction** and **tourism** sectors are the most advanced to bolster community support as well as increase awareness for a circular economy.

Textiles and Construction

Circularization efforts in the textiles sector can be pivotal not just for dealing with existing waste but also for future garment productions. In the Gambia, several projects have been undertaken to boost the circular economy, which is as follows:

1. One Plastic Bag Initiative by Issatou Ceesay.

Initiatio.Issatou Ceesay is often called the Queen of Recycling who began the project in 1997, which is today supported by multiple British and other organizations³⁰. It hires 11,000 workers as a part of the project to use plastic to make fashion accessories³¹. These include unique coloured purses, garments that are made from plastic and sold in the markets³².

Reusing discarded plastic is crucial for circularization. The production enables entrepreneurship, skill development as well as promotes SDGs in the country. This allows boosting inclusion of informal workers, unskilled workers and benefits livelihoods of plastic rag-pickers as they receive further training.

2. Metal and Briquettes Production by GreenTech.

Initiator, the GreenTech is a company specializing in cooking fuel chains. The company invests in the

²⁶Benjamin, Nancy, The Informal Sector in Francophone Africa for the World Bank. Available at <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/737371468202815116/pdf/699350PUB0Publ067869B09780821395370.pdf>

²⁷Sallah, Abdoulie (2006), Challenging the Orthodoxy of Economic Globalisation; a Performative Discourse That Activates the Dynamics of Underdevelopment in West Africa for International Conference on Human and Economic Resources. Available at <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/6989904.pdf>.

²⁸Stanislaus, Mathy (2018), Barriers to a Circular Economy: 5 Reasons the World Wastes So Much Stuff (and Why It's Not

Just the Consumer's Fault) for the World Resource Institute. Available at <https://www.wri.org/insights/barriers-circular-economy-5-reasons-world-wastes-so-much-stuff-and-why-its-not-just>

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰Hunt, Louise (2014), Gambia- recycling for women's health and independence for The Ecologist. Available at <https://theecologist.org/2014/aug/13/gambia-recycling-womens-wealth-and-independence>

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

designs and research of fuel-efficient stoves for Gambian villages³³. For this purpose, it uses groundnut shells to make briquettes. These are, in turn, used to power stoves in villages and are cheap and durable and emit lesser carbons when burnt³⁴.

The usage of groundnut shells is crucial due to the large scale production of groundnuts in the country. It enables energy production as well as the production of briquettes for both household and other purposes. It also promotes a new business model by demonstrating the use of discarded shells for profit.

● 3. Pavement Tiles by Alieu Sowe.

Initiator, Alieu Sowe is a recycling firm. Launched in 2009, the organization is involved in plastics collections, which are processed and treated³⁵. Later, they are powdered and made into pavement tiles. While the project is still in its early stages, they have successfully used plastics to form reusable plastic bottles³⁶.

The pavement tiles project strengthens youth empowerment and further mobilizes the youth to act towards the environment. Moreover, successful innovation can allow these tiles to establish a new market and encourage others to change practices for better prices.

Tourism

Apart from the textiles and construction sectors, tourism forms a large part of the Gambian economy. Circularization efforts in this sector have been ongoing concerning agro and eco-tourism.

● 1. Kankanba Farm by Santander BEST Africa.

Initiated by Santander BEST Africa, the project outlines the inclusion of agro-tourism along with the usage of farms and other industrial products to enhance tourism³⁷. It includes peanut shells from

processing plants and usage of wood shavings from factories as fertilizers³⁸.

The Kankanba farm is one of many Gambia sites that use industrial and farm waste to promote agriculture. Since the farm is also a site for tourists, it allows to stimulate the local economy and take part in circularization. Most importantly, the circularization enables cheaper fertilization of larger spaces that are used as tourist destinations.

● 2. Footsteps EcoLodge

The ecolodge, established in 2002, makes use of toilet and kitchen waste for compost³⁹. This was followed by reusing water from all rooms and kitchen for gardening. A policy for hiring local people also reduces travel time⁴⁰.

The circularization of the waste products from hotels and kitchens has reduced prices. The circularization has attracted consumers (tourists) to the lodge and increased its revenues from reputation. It also benefits the local economy and overall ecosystem as locals are hired to work, which helps the circular flow of income and gives back to the local community.

Recommendations & ways forward

As the Gambian economy and population are set to grow, it is crucial to push the government and civil society actors to increase efforts to incorporate CE into the daily lives of its people. For this purpose, the global trading system should be suitable and facilitate actions to catalyze CE. It is essential to leverage key opportunities presented to the government by the global community. International Organizations often enable the development of skills and capacity building which can be crucial for the Gambia, where assistance is usually required.

³³NATIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP POLICY DRAFT (2016), The Gambia. Available at <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/qpr/national-entrepreneurship-policy.pdf>

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Brito, Sarjo (2021), How one firm owned by Gambian who swapped Europe for Gambia is redefining nation's plastic recycling infrastructure for The Fatu. Available at [https://fatunetwork.net/how-one-firm-owned-by-gambian-who-swapped-europe-for-gambia-is-redefining-nations-plastic-](https://fatunetwork.net/how-one-firm-owned-by-gambian-who-swapped-europe-for-gambia-is-redefining-nations-plastic-recycling-infrastructure/)

[recycling-infrastructure/](#)

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Kakanba Farm, Available at <https://www.kankanbafarm.org/the-farm/>

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Sustainable Tourism, Footsteps in the Gambia. Available at <https://footstepsinthegambia.com/sustainable-tourism-at-footsteps/>

⁴⁰ Ibid

However, assistance may not be limited to policymaking concerning CE, and funding from organisations like African Development Bank or developed countries should also support specific promote initial CE projects in the country.

Assistance in domestic policy-making

As discussed previously, the absence of an integrated national policy on CE could lead to a loss of economic, trade and development opportunities. In particular, the relevant international and regional organizations should assist in holding discussions to promote the formulation of national CE policies throughout the region. It has the advantage of early and global identification and unified response to CE opportunities and challenges. Further, there is also a need for establishing mechanisms like voluntary peer reviews and technical assistance to share and adopt best practices and experiences in the CE sector.

International regulations on goods needed for CE

As previously seen, there remains hesitancy against recycled and remanufactured goods in Gambian society. For this purpose, there must be discussions and assistance to identify and set relevant global health, safety and regulatory standards for the production of CE goods. Consequently, it can limit hesitancy by increasing the confidence of the public, as well as set limits to trade of toxic and unwanted goods between countries.

During the production of the circularized goods, many companies may not have access to other used products. These may be critical to forming the end product and hence may need to import used products from other countries. For this purpose, it is important that countries identify potential sectors and establish a favourable trading environment in these goods. This will: i) benefit bilateral trade, ii) increase circularization and its potential, and iii) strengthen innovation and capacity.

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