

Circular Lunch Club Summary Report

Summary Report

On 20 June 2024, Circular South Africa (CSA) launched its first Circular Lunch Club themed “The Circular and Green Economy: What is the Difference?” This 30-minute webinar, in partnership with GreenCape’s Kirsten Barnes, aimed to clarify the differences between the circular economy and the green economy, addressing prevalent confusion and emphasising the need for actionable steps.

Introduction:

The webinar began with an introduction to CSA by Katharina Gihiring, who shared the purpose of the Circular Lunch Club. These short, informative sessions are intended to inspire engagement with various topics related to the circular economy in South Africa.

Distinguishing Circular and Green Economies:

ISO Standard for Circular Economy: Recently established, this standard defines the circular economy as a system that maintains a circular flow of resources through recovery, retention, or value addition, contributing to sustainable development.

Resource Focus: The current circular economy discourse is primarily concerned with waste management and resource efficiency, aiming to make processes more sustainable with less resource use. However, the circular economy is a systems approach.

Green Economy Focus: The green economy emphasizes ecosystem resilience and human well-being. There is an argument that the circular economy, while focused on resources, should also centralize human well-being and ecosystem health.

“There is a need for a systemic approach and action. Despite over 220 definitions of the circular economy, the focus should be on moving beyond definitions to actionable steps and real-world application.” Katharina Gihiring

Various graphs illustrated the differences between the circular and green economies, emphasizing the systemic nature of circularity and its potential for broader impact.

Katharina shared the 10 R's of the Circular Economy, an expansion from the traditional 3 R's. The circular economy now encompasses 10 R's, including refuse, reduce, reuse, repair, refurbish, and remanufacture, reflecting a comprehensive approach to resource management. There is more focus on sufficiency, preventing raw material use, while efficiency emphasizes redesign and better use of resources

“Green” is often misused,’ stated Kirsten Barnes.

“Green” is sometimes applied to a linear system where one aspect of it has improved (eg reducing electricity usage), but what is not seen is the whole operation, and what is not considered is the whole lifecycle of the system. When discussing a circular economy, we need to think of the system as a whole. Starting with redefining our relationship to raw materials in terms of which we choose to and how we extract, use, and produce resources from them. It is also about redefining our relationship with people in our community.





Katharina Gihring
CSA
Facilitator



Kirsten Barnes
Greencape
Partner Guest

At GreenCape, we emphasize a people-inclusive design in the circular economy. We need to think about how we are creating opportunities within our economic system as a country, and we can choose to make this central in the development of our circular economy in South Africa.

When discussing the circular economy, the focus is often on waste management or recycling alone. This approach neglects material choice, material extraction, product design, and manufacturing. Manufacturers are not designing products for the end-of-life of its first use, ie manufacturers are not designing products to be reused, remanufactured/ refurbished, and/or recycled, thereby avoiding landfill.

The floor was then opened for questions from the participants. Here are some of the challenges and initiatives pointed out by the participants:

- **Waste Management:** Integrated Waste Management is crucial, especially in South Africa where many communities lack proper waste management services. The need to have effective collaboration between the private collection sector (informal and formal), municipalities, and producers/PROs to achieve better recovery of material was highlighted.
- **Job Creation:** The circular economy has the potential to create numerous jobs through inclusive design and better resource management.
- **Baby Diapers and Hygienic Products:** Addressing the disposal and management of products like baby diapers requires systemic redesign rather than simple material replacement.
- **Support for SMEs:** Programs like the [Green Pitch Challenge](#) offer support and opportunities for SMEs to pitch ideas to investors, fostering innovation in the circular economy space.

Key Takeaways:

Human and Community Focus: Both approaches need to prioritise human well-being and community resilience, particularly in the South African context.

System Redesign: Effective circular economy practices require a systemic approach that considers the entire lifecycle of products and materials.

Collaboration: Ongoing collaboration between different sectors and organizations is essential for advancing circular economy initiatives.

Conclusion:

The session emphasized the importance of continuing the conversation around circular and green economies, acknowledging that this is a developing field with evolving practices and definitions. Potential follow-up topics include extended producer responsibility (EPR) and integrating circularity into public sector initiatives through master classes and collaborative projects.

Register to become a member or partner of CSA. Follow us on our WhatsApp Update Channel and register for the next Circular Lunch Club, held on 25th of July on the topic of Extended Producer Responsibility using the links below.

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