

Empowerment of  
Rural NationsSecretary of State in Charge  
of Sustainable Development

# SUSTAINING INTERNATIONAL WATERS COOPERATION

## Circular Economy breakout session report

Session Coordinators: Nilguen Tas, United Nations Industrial Development Organization; Isabelle Vanderbeck and Jill Raval, United Nations Environment; Liz Izquierdo, Capturing Coral Reef and Related Ecosystem Services Project

1. **Key messages** - The CE breakout session helped unpack the concept of circular economy and demonstrate opportunities that the concept offers: CE is producing more with less; it is where the value of materials in products are maintained at their maximum value as long as possible by innovative designs that dematerialize and detoxify products, resource efficient production technologies, reuse, repurposing, recycling, new business models and recovery. CE is relevant in all contexts from high to middle- and low-income countries and can provide opportunities and competitive advantages. There are several CE definitions, but it doesn't matter which one we adopt as long as we ensure sustainability. It provides avenues to support SDGs and the commitment under the Paris Agreement. These approaches can be embedded into existing national processes rather than developing "new" strategies per se. Governments and countries are overwhelmed by all these new concepts therefore there is a need now to streamline definitions and to move forward for achieving transformational change on the ground.
2. The key **objective of CE breakout session** was to introduce the session participants (around 25) to the circular economy principles and practices – and this was successfully achieved and supported by the polling results. This indicated that our session achieved its purpose of raising awareness and helped the international waters community understand how the CE concept can be of relevance to their work.
3. Our five speakers highlighted systemic and transformational circular economy solutions in the field of;
  - 🎬 **Water reclamation**; for Heineken a sustainable future is water circularity with zero impact on watersheds – 95% of beer is water therefore we need to consider the golden water triangle rules of efficiency, water balancing, and circularity.
  - 🎬 **Resource efficient cleaner production and chemical leasing**; according to RECPnet, resource efficient cleaner production offers solutions to reduce material, water and energy use by product, process and equipment modifications, input change, on-site reuse of by-products and recycling. Chemical leasing is a CE business model where chemicals users pay for the performance/function of chemicals instead of buying chemicals by the volume or weight. This concept brings opportunities because it enables producing more with less raw material, in this case, chemicals.
  - 🎬 **Nitrogen cycle and food production** - (INI) – valuing the waste as a resource is a starting point to change the narrative, wastewater reuse for agriculture is key, and farm manure management can ensure nutrient use efficiency
  - 🎬 **Marine plastics (GEF project ID – 9681)** - adopting the value chain approach is a sustainable way forward; eliminating single-use plastic must be promoted, and innovation in plastic that we will always need (medical sector etc.) is required. The role of the big manufactures (EPR) and the consumers is key in solving the plastic issue. Circular economy is about keeping the plastics inside the circle of use but outside the ecosystem.

The breakout session was made interactive after the presentations, whereby, the participants were given the opportunity to ask the panelists a series of questions that helped them further understand the linkages between the GEF international waters agenda and the circular economy concept.

4. The survey conducted towards the end of the session also shed light on the understanding of the audience in terms of applicability of circular practices in all sectors, what waste really meant, and whether circular business was good for business or just for compliance, in addition to asking participants whether they thought CE could be applicable to their work (100% confirmed!).