

CIRCULAR ECONOMY PROGRAMME IN GEORGIA

ACCELERATING THE TRANSITION TO THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE – THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

The circular economy is a model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible. In this way, the life cycle of products is extended. In practice, it implies reducing waste to a minimum. A circular economy is a systemic approach to economic development designed to benefit businesses, society, and the environment. In contrast to the ‘take-make-waste’ linear model, a circular economy is regenerative by design and aims to gradually decouple growth from the consumption of finite resources. Circular development is a model of socially and environmentally responsible production and consumption that aims to build a sustainable society based on a circular model. The aim is to enable economies and societies in general to become more autonomous, sustainable and in tune with the issue of environmental resources.

There is also a clear link between the Circular Economy and our efforts to address Climate Change issues. Renewable energy solutions on their own have the capacity to address only around 30 per cent of emissions responsible for climate change. 70 per cent are stemming from resource use and handling. We need the clean energy transition to happen, but it cannot keep us on the well below 2-degrees trajectory alone. Nor does it tackle our rising consumption levels and concerning resource scarcity.

Like with any systemic change, the transition to the circular economy requires several elements of the system to change simultaneously. Concerted actions by a host of stakeholders are needed. Governments at all levels, businesses, innovators, academia, investors and consumers all have to play their distinct roles and contribute to the process. Universities and other educational entities can play an important role in creating circular businesses. The principal objective should be to succeed in educating experts in a variety of areas to correctly identify, conceptualise and develop circular business models and projects that are both sound and bankable, and congruent with a long-term development vision and strategy for the transition to the circular economy. These experts can advise and improve the economic viability and bankability of projects; and visualise collaborative arrangements within the supply chain to fully embrace the circularity principles, to ensure circular business models become the best option for companies willing to gain competitive advantage and maintain their market share while aligning their goals with society’s goals.

The circular economy is not the responsibility of a chosen few. We all have the right to participate in the creation of a sustainable future. Circular economy education is not aimed at educating special experts in the circular economy. The objective is that in the future all of us will need to have sound knowledge of circular economy principles and basics, and to know how to implement circular economy solutions in our respective areas of expertise.

The ongoing programme being implemented by CSO Georgian Society of Nature Explorers “Orchis” and supported by the Government of Sweden has been designed to raise awareness about circular economy and provide recommendations to various groups of stakeholders. The 6th Conference under the programme for the Georgian Universities and other educational entities which was conducted in March 2022 raised a lot of interest and resulted in a stimulating discussion on how to incorporate circularity principles in educational curricula and provide information and raise awareness about circular economy in their training programmes. At the request from the universities, the 8th Conference under the programme will also target educational entities and in addition to core basic information will also provide practical examples how circularity principles could be implemented, particularly among Small and Medium Sized Enterprises.