



Towards a Circular Economy:

*A workshop for parliamentarians and
parliamentary staff of Trinidad and Tobago*

#ParlAmericasCC

THEMES: Circular economy

DATE: April 6, 2022

VENUE: Virtual

PARTICIPANTS: More than 40 parliamentarians, parliamentary staff from Trinidad and Tobago accompanied by experts representing academia, the private sector, and regional organizations

ORGANIZING PARTNER: The Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

This activity is aligned with SDG 5, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, & 15.

FEATURED PARTICIPANTS

Opening remarks:

- The Honourable **Bridgid Annisette-George** (Trinidad and Tobago), Speaker of the House of Representatives and Vice-President of ParlAmericas

Panellists:

- **Vanessa Esslinger**, Circular Economy Specialist & Coordination of the Circular Economy Coalition for Latin America and the Caribbean
- **David Oswald**, Founder and President, DE Design + Environment Inc., Fellow of the Royal Canadian Geographic Society, and Associate Faculty, Royal Roads University
- **Dr. Sherwyn Millette**, Sustainability Consultant at the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago



- **Sian Cuffy-Young**, Waste management Educator, Trainer and Founder of Siel Environmental Services Limited

Dialogues moderated by:

- Senator **Anthony Vieira** (Trinidad and Tobago), Vice-President for the Caribbean of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network on Climate Change

Facilitators of SWOT Analysis:

- Ms. **Terriann Baker**, Graduate Research Assistant – Office of the Parliament
- Mr. **Johnson Greenidge**, Procedural Clerk Assistant – Senate

Closing remarks:

- The Honourable **Christine Kangaloo** (Trinidad and Tobago), President of the Senate

SUMMARY

The importance of the circular economic model cannot be understated as it features cross-cutting benefits in mitigating the effects of climate change, improving the health of the public and the natural environment by addressing biodiversity loss, waste, and pollution, and its increased relevance in the context of postCOVID-19 economic recovery plans. Recognizing that 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, ParlAmericas offered parliamentarians and parliamentary staff of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago the opportunity to deepen their knowledge on this innovative economic model, as a follow-up to the [17th ParlAmericas Plenary Assembly: Towards a Circular Economy](#) and through consultation with the Honourable Bridgid Annisette-George (Trinidad and Tobago), Speaker of the House of Representatives and Vice-President of ParlAmericas.

Taking into consideration that the lack of legal support across jurisdictions remains a hindrance to effective circular economy plans across the globe, this activity sought to equip parliamentarians with an introduction to the topic to inform possible next steps at the parliament to work with national authorities and diverse actors to put circular economy on the public agenda.

Featuring a panel of subject-matter experts representing various stakeholders, **this national level workshop called on participants to apply circular lens to legislative efforts in diverse sectors beyond waste management (such as education, land-use, and disaster risk reduction) as well as highlight the importance of data collection for the oversight of circular economy policies and evidence-based decision making, the progress made thus far in the Caribbean region and nationally, the benefits of regional collaboration, and how to better engage local communities on this agenda, especially women and the youth.**



The complete [agenda](#), [press release](#), and [video recording](#), from this activity can be accessed on the ParlAmericas website

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE PRESENTATIONS



Vanessa Esslinger, Circular Economy Specialist & Coordination of the Circular Economy Coalition for Latin America and the Caribbean

- Circular Economy is not only an environmental agenda - It is also an economic agenda which requires meticulous examination of the production and consumption models for goods and services across all sectors.
- The 3 principles of Circular Economy include: 1) Eliminate waste and pollution by design, 2) Maintain products and materials in use at their highest value, and 3) Regenerate natural systems.
- When repurposing waste there has to be mindful consideration that the solution does not create a problem in a different area.
 - I.e., Recycled plastic bottles can contain chemicals more harmful to human health than those made from virgin plastic.
- It is important to differentiate between the following approaches:
 - Eco-efficiency which refers to the use of natural resources at the lowest possible environmental cost, i.e., increasing output and using less through alternate energy sources.
 - Eco-effectiveness, on the other hand, considers the purpose and proposes solutions at the lowest possible environmental cost from the initial design stage. i.e., constructing a building in such a way that it requires less energy to be sustained.
- Circular economy as a concept calls for a re-focusing of products as a service, moving away from owning and consuming things to being users. i.e., car sharing services do not require the ownership of vehicles.



David Oswald, Founder and President, DE Design + Environment Inc., Fellow of the Royal Canadian Geographic Society, and Associate Faculty, Royal Roads University

- Data is not information; it requires proper interpretation in order to inform decisions.
- It is necessary for adaptive management to be built into regulatory regimes in response to the non-static and non-linear nature of the problems faced. This provides an iterative process where regulations can be regularly re-visited.
- National level data is essential for environmental information systems as well as governance. It also facilitates the oversight of policies allowing for the monitoring of progress on commitment to multilateral environmental agreements and the efficacy of policy instruments. To support the level of data acquisition required, data sharing agreements across institutions is essential.



- An open data paradigm where data is accessible to the public can be a way to engage them in sustainable development.
- Resilience can be built with the circular economy paradigm through stakeholder engagement, in-field data acquisition, and capacity development. In the agricultural sector this data can be used to develop risk maps to support disaster risk reduction.



Dr. Sherwyn Millette, Sustainability Consultant at the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago

- We cannot manage what we cannot measure; data is key in our ability to move forward.
 - For example, Trinidad and Tobago imports 129 000 metric tonnes of plastic. The plastic film embedded within these imports are large (52 757 metric tonnes) and hard to recycle. With this data, opportunities to reduce spending on imports can be identified.
- An assessment of the current state of circular economy in Trinidad and Tobago includes these core aspects:
 - The use of regenerative resources - where the exploration of renewable energy is underway with notable opportunities for wind energy generation harnessed from the Northeast Trade winds.
 - The maximization of resource's lifetime use - while there is a movement towards a recycling economy with the presence of various collection sites, it needs to be taken a step further by reducing the use of virgin materials and developing pathways where waste can be returned as a nutrient to the environment or utilised as an energy source.
 - Waste as a resource - there exists a potential in industrial symbiosis where the waste of one system can provide resources for another. For example, waste plastic can be sequestered into cement blocks. This requires an understanding of the materials in a system, such as through Material Flow Analysis. Locally this has been driven so far by private enterprises.
- Parliaments can assist in creating an environment that identifies opportunities, supports entrepreneurs, incentives good practices, allow for movement and diverse use of waste even outside national borders to account for the financial viability of a small economy.



Sian Cuffy-Young, Waste management Educator, Trainer and Founder of Siel Environmental Services Limited

- There needs to be an overall mindset shift. The production of waste should be seen as a design flaw instead of the inevitable by-product of the things we make. The amount of waste produced is an indication of how well resources are managed.
- Education needs to be at the centre of community-based initiatives while recognizing that an increase in knowledge does not correlate to a change in behaviour.



- Community based social marketing strategy can be used to influence behaviour change which includes identifying the desired behaviour; assessing the barriers and advantages for adopting this change; implementing pilot test strategies on a small cohort; and finally, a monitoring and evaluation process.
- Women, due to their role in the household and community, can be drivers of behaviour change especially in terms of family habits, energy consumption, and waste production. The empowerment and substantive participation of citizens in decision-making processes, and especially of youth and women, can also help to ensure that programs and policies are accessible to all.
- We are all consumers and by shifting consumption behaviour producers can be influenced to make a change and take responsibility for the products they are manufacturing.

The presentations and further resources can be found below:

- Background document: [Introduction to Circular Economy Workshop](#)
- Presentation: [Circular Economy in Trinidad and Tobago](#)
- Presentation: [The Role of Data, Monitoring, and Reporting](#)
- Presentation: [The Role of Education](#)
- Web resource, Circular Economy Roadmaps: [Environment and Sustainability: Mapping strategies and plans of the Americas and the Caribbean](#)
- Shorter activity report of the workshop: [Towards a Circular Economy: A Workshop for Parliamentarians and Parliamentary Staff of Trinidad and Tobago](#)

WORDS INTO ACTION: SWOT ANALYSIS

Afterwards, the interactive section, “Words into Action”, had participants separated into two groups as they used the SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat) analysis to **explore the various advantages and barriers they need to navigate in order to support a national transition to circularity.**

- Notably, the need to advocate for an overarching circular economy plan to guide policy directive was identified among the weaknesses discussed, while the opportunities stated included the various multilateral relationships and memorandum of understandings the parliament holds with diverse external stakeholders that can potentially provide financial support and technical guidance to aid the nation’s transition.
- The parliament, through its various functions, features various strengths that can advance the circular economy transition in Trinidad and Tobago. Participants highlighted the legislative role as



possibly the strongest entry point where, for example, private member motions can empower citizens and incentivize innovation.

- Even though it is the responsibility of the Executive Branch to develop policies, parliament can influence policy by providing oversight through the lens of circularity, in hopes to ensure the national development of the country is aligned with circular economy objectives as well as the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Also listed among the strengths were the parliament's strong and diverse communication channels together with their representative role through which relationships with their constituencies can be a major avenue for information dissemination regarding circular economy concepts to influence behaviour change across various communities, sectors, and special interest groups.

Through this activity and the enriching dialogues facilitated, participants enhanced their understanding of circular economy as a framework that decouples economic activity from environmental degradation while also possessing the potential to address social and economic inequalities.

FOLLOW-UP EVENT: ART EXHIBITION

In commemoration of World Environment Day, designated by the UN General Assembly to be recognized annually on the 5th of June, The Rotunda Gallery of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago featured an art exhibit "Towards a Circular Economy: Imagining an Unpolluted World through Art." Accepting visual art submissions from nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, this exhibit welcomed the innovative depiction of circular economy and the use of what would otherwise be considered waste, to create a message designed to raise awareness of environmental conservation efforts in the country.



View the catalogue of the [art exhibit](#)

