

NGO NEXUS: SHARING SUCCESS

Building a Circular Economy



Leveraging resources for projects

The goal of this document is to encourage the sharing of effective strategies among NGOs and community-based organisations, to strengthen a network of individuals driving positive change. Leveraging the expertise found in SIP's best practices, this information serves as a guidance for distribution and implementation of best practices.

What is a circular economy?

A circular economy can be described as an innovative and regenerative economic model designed to minimise waste and make the most of available resources. Unlike the traditional linear economy, which follows a "take, make, dispose" approach, a circular economy focuses on keeping products, materials, and resources in use for as long as possible.



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The Social Employment Fund

The Social Employment Fund (SEF), managed by the Industrial Development Corporation, has provided meaningful work for over 89,000 individuals in various community-benefitting areas in just over a year.

Strategic Implementing Partners (SIPs) are tasked with employing a minimum of 1,000 participants for 16 hours per week in projects serving the common good.

Currently, the SEF collaborates with 37 SIPs in areas like community health, education, greening, and arts, who, in turn, partner with over 1,000 community organisations.

Visit the [SEF microsite](#) for more information

Characteristics of a circular economy





The importance of a circular economy in the social development space

- **Reduced environmental injustice.** Circular economy practices work to reduce environmental pollution and degradation, which often disproportionately affects marginalised/poorer communities. By minimising waste and pollution, the circular economy contributes to environmental justice, a UN sustainable development goal, to which funders are often aligned when approving grants.
- **Education and awareness.** Implementing circular economy principles requires public awareness and education. This process of raising awareness can lead to a more informed and environmentally conscious society, promoting responsible consumption patterns.
- **Social entrepreneurship.** Circular economy principles can enhance social entrepreneurship, providing opportunities for businesses of all sizes to address social and environmental issues simultaneously. This dual impact can contribute to sustainable development goals, and can be attractive to funders.

A circular economy offers dual benefits: fostering low-carbon growth and resilience while addressing South Africa's challenges of inequality, poverty, and unemployment.



Photo credit: National Arts Festival

- **Job creation.** Transitioning to a circular economy often requires new skills and labour, leading to the creation of jobs in sectors related to recycling, repair, remanufacturing, and sustainable product design. This job creation contributes to economic development and improved livelihoods.
- **Skills development.** Contributors to a circular economy learn valuable skills and knowledge sometimes giving way to future job and micro businesses opportunities. In the South African context this is critical.
- **Inclusive growth.** Circular economy practices allows for inclusivity by providing opportunities for marginalised or disadvantaged communities to participate in the economy. This helps bridge social and economic disparities, while having a positive impact on the environment at the same time.
- **Community engagement.** Circular economy initiatives often involve community participation in recycling programmes, repair workshops, and local resource management. This engagement builds a sense of community ownership and empowerment.
- **Access to affordable products and services.** Extending the lifespan of products through repair and reuse often make goods more affordable for more people. This accessibility supports lower-income individuals and communities.



Tips for designing circular economies into programmes

Development programmes, such as the Social Employment Fund (SEF), serve as a solution to two pressing societal challenges: high unemployment rates and plenty of untapped opportunities for community development. By viewing these challenges as catalysts for innovative ideas, transformative changes unfold.

1. Where to start?

Keep it simple! The design does not have to be complicated. More often than not the solution to the problem you're working on lies within the very issue you're addressing. For example:

Recycled plastics can be used to create interlocking pavers and building bricks, while crushed glass serves as an alternative to sand in the mixture. Paved roads, known for their durability when properly laid, are labour-intensive and easily repairable.

When faced with the dual challenge of excessive waste and pothole-ridden roads, create pavers and bricks, turning waste into infrastructure and simultaneously addressing community needs.

In drought-affected areas with nutrient-deprived soil impacting yields and an abundance of green waste collected from vegetation clearing, the solution is composting.

In areas plagued by invasive species like black wattle, which exacerbate water scarcity during droughts, the answer lies in the production of wood chip, charcoal, and biochar to safeguard gardens.

Tips for designing circular economies into programmes

2. Embrace recycling and reuse

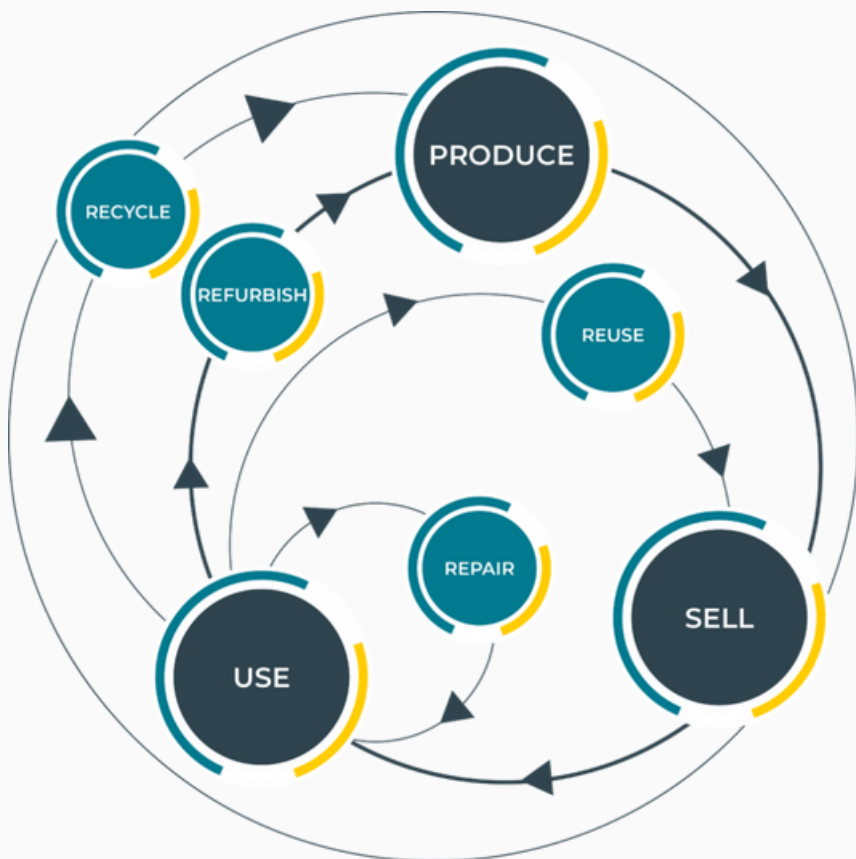
- Commit to recycling all materials
- Prioritise repair, refurbishment, and repurposing
- Actively encourage reuse

3. Empower community investment

- Utilise local knowledge and experiences
- Innovate products from recycled materials
- Create value through local expertise

4. Harness local expertise

- Support income generation within communities by promoting sale of items when possible
- Create new products from recycled materials
- Drive micro-enterprises with circular principles



Addressing community challenges through circular solutions involves a multifaceted approach.

THIS DOCUMENT WAS CO-CREATED BY THE SOCIAL EMPLOYMENT NETWORK WITH THE NATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL. ITS PURPOSE IS TO FACILITATE INFORMATION SHARING AND THE DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE REGARDING CIRCULAR ECONOMIES.

The National Arts Festival

Since 1974, the National Arts Festival (NAF) has been a cornerstone of Makhanda, South Africa. As the continent's largest arts festival, it draws a significant global audience. Makhanda, renowned for its cultural vibrancy thanks to NAF, hosts esteemed educational institutions and historical landmarks.

Despite education and tourism industries, the city of Makhanda is often regarded as a failed city. There is 34,9% unemployment and an estimated 45% youth unemployment, not to mention the challenges of water shortages and load shedding. Suffice to say there is little opportunity, infrastructure, or investment. What isn't limited however, is the NAF's ongoing commitment and passion to keep the city alive and functioning in areas far beyond the arts.

Through the SEF, a growing force of young Makhandans is revitalising the city. These workers are tackling various tasks – clearing drains, fixing potholes, collecting trash, improving schools, fostering gardens, recycling, and contributing to local nonprofits. Their efforts have already impacted 1600 lives positively, offering employment and a sense of pride.



Photo credit: National Arts Festival



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