

Circular Resources for our Common Future: Cities as Drivers

Conference Summary by Paramita Datta Dey, Head (Resources and Waste) and Program Lead at the National Institute of Urban Affairs

Good Afternoon everyone and a warm welcome to our dignitaries for the valedictory session – Mr. G Asok Kumar, Mr. Ravinder, Mr. Jagdale and Nicolas. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to be with us today.

It is my honour to present a summary of this two days conference on circular cities.

Before I get down to the sessions and activities, let me give you a brief context about why we decided to hold this conference.

Though the concept of circular economy is not new, it has gained amplified momentum, primarily due to the disruptions in critical supply chains because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The LIFE Mission launched by our honourable PM explicitly promotes the concept of a circular and sustainable lifestyle. It strives to replace the prevalent 'use-and-dispose' or linear economy with a circular economy.

NIUA, being the technical secretariat of U-20 is supporting the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).

The identified priority areas for this U-20 cycle, which is the sixth one, are

1. Encouraging Environmentally Responsible Behaviours
2. Ensuring Water Security
3. Accelerating Climate Finance
4. Championing Local Identity
5. Reinventing Frameworks for Planning and Governance
6. Catalysing Digital Urban Futures

Circular economy and circular cities are part of all but more specifically it is part of priority one. That is “Encouraging Environmentally Responsible Behaviours”.

We see this conference as a platform for cities to learn from each other and from other stakeholders like experts, academia, businesses, and NGOs. We think that if we want to drive home the concept of circularity then cities are the main drivers.

We, therefore, designed an interactive agenda to make sure that each stakeholder gets the opportunity to talk and share his or her views.

We began with a plenary session on international perspectives. The panel included Mr Tejas Bhandari from Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, Ms. Antya Berger from the German Embassy, Mr. Holger from GIZ , Ms. Sharon Gil from UNEP, Mr. Nicolas from the Global Solutions Initiative and Ms. Shuva from CEEW.

Ahmedabad city being the U-20 Sherpa briefed us with all the circular efforts being carried out by the city in the area of transport, water, wastewater and solid waste management. The city has also come up with innovative circular instruments like the environmental

improvement cess, and circular finance and has established an energy efficiency cell where they are working on solar and wind energy.

Ms. Berger talked about the relevance of the circular economy across sectors and the projects that the German Technical cooperation is carrying out in India.

Mr. Holger and Mr. Nicolas elucidated about the CESD and the efforts of the Global Solutions initiative and informed participants about the upcoming event of the GSI in May in Berlin and the book on Resources for the future.

In the parallel thematic sessions, participants learnt about some best practices in the waste, sanitation and water sectors; habitat and governance and energy and mobility. We had presentations from and discussions between the commissioners, additional commissioners and representatives from the development sector (i.e. think tanks, academia, experts and NGOs). Some of the key takeaways from the sessions on waste and WASH are the engagement of people, passionate leadership, a combination of decentralised and centralised solutions and out-of-the-box thinking, long-term, medium-term planning and sustainability are the keys to achieving circularity in this sector.

In the peer circles, we had smaller group presentations in trade fair booth style where all participants first heard about innovative solutions from start-ups and innovative solution providers both national and international. Being mindful of the time I am not reading out the names.

The key takeaway from this session was that cities found the conference to be a good platform where they got an opportunity to discuss this with them in smaller groups. It was interesting to see how the city officials talked openly about their challenges and we witnessed matching with the different solution providers. The format was well received by all and everyone agreed that we need to have a platform where cities can talk about their challenges and a platform like this can help to find the appropriate solution provider.

We had some interesting innovations in the Octi-tank session with short but very effective pitches. Most of these are scalable practical solutions.

On day 2, participants got an opportunity to learn about some tools for circular cities. The Circle Economy made a presentation on the circularity gap report. It was a revelation to see that the world is becoming less circular in 2023 as compared to 2022. The Circular Cities Barometer developed by Holcim in collaboration with Bloomberg is based on four pillars – circular buildings, circular systems, circular living and circular leadership. It was interesting to see the large variation across the globe in the 25 cities that featured in the ranking. Delhi was one of them. Further, we got insights into the circular cities action framework developed by ICLEI in collaboration with Circle Economy and Ellen McArthur Foundation. Finally, the Circular Jobs tool by UNEP was interesting and it was insightful to learn that data from 300 cities were collected to test this tool. Mr George Osborne's presentation on his experience of developing Hume city as a circular city generated a lot of interest as one of the trendsetters among cities.

In the end, I would like to say that we saw a lot of enthusiasm in the room to carry the idea forward of setting up a centre for circular cities and possibly make this into an annual event.