

Event Report

Making Circular Economy Work: An Opportunity for Lao Businesses

ACEBA – LNCCI Partnership Launch, Business Forum and Starter Training

7 August 2026 | 08:30 - 16:00

DoubleTree by Hilton, Vientiane, Lao PDR

1 Background

Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) and ASEAN Circular Economy Business Alliance (ACEBA) agreed to partner for promoting Circular Economy in Lao PDR to support business development and sustainable use of materials and other natural resources. The partnership was launched on Friday 7 August 2026, followed by business forum focused on sharing and reflection upon business experiences and a starter training on application of Circular Economy practices in particular in Small and Medium Enterprises.

Southeast Asia has committed to transition to the Circular Economy to support resilient economy, sustainable growth, and resource efficiency, through the regional 2021 ASEAN Circular Economy Framework¹. This is complemented by national policy and action plans in most ASEAN Member States. Lao PDR has started the development of its Circular Economy Action Plan.

Leading businesses and other organisations in Lao PDR² and elsewhere in the region³ have started to benefit from the adoption of Circular Economy practices in sectors as diverse as hospitality, building materials, agri-food, textiles and recycling and resource recovery.

The ASEAN Circular Economy Business Alliance (ACEBA)⁴ has been launched in 2024 with the support of the EU SWITCH Asia Policy Support Component⁵ to further facilitate business leadership and action on Circular Economy in support of stated national and regional policy objectives. ACEBA engages businesses through advocacy, knowledge and experience sharing, provision of actionable tools and insights and networking. The Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) is taking the lead to introduce ACEBA to business and other stakeholders in Lao PDR.

Objectives

LNCCI and ACEBA formally launched their partnership and collaboration through a three-part agenda on Friday 7 August 2026.

¹ https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Framework-for-Circular-Economy-for-the-AEC_Final.pdf

² <https://www.switch-asia.eu/resource/circular-economy-an-opportunity-for-businesses-in-laos/>

³ <https://www.switch-asia.eu/resource/getting-your-business-ahead-with-circularity-a-circular-economy-starter-for-east-asian-business/>

⁴ www.aceba.co

⁵ <https://www.switch-asia.eu/our-work/multi-country/asean-circular-economy-pact-acep-mobilizing-business-action-for-circular-economy/>

1. The **ACEBA LNCCI Circular Economy Partnership launch**, LNCCI became the ACEBA Country Lead, following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between LNCCI and ARAIBA Sdn Bhd (as the organisational anchor of ACEBA), in the presence of the EU Delegation to Lao.
2. The **Circular Economy Business Forum**, an introduction to Circular Economy as a responsible business and innovation practice that supports business to perform well while doing good for environment and society. This included experience sharing with Lao businesses and s reflections from business and government stakeholders.
3. The **Circular Business Starter Training for Small and Medium Enterprises**, a practical training session based on ACEBA's business tools, in particular its implementation guide (Unlocking the circularity opportunity)⁶ and the Circular Business Check⁷.

2 Proceedings

The workshop was held on 7th August 2026 under the chairmanship of the vice president of Lao National Chamber of Commerce Mr. Vanthong Sithikoun, and co-chaired by Mr Thomas Thomas, Co-Convenor of the ASEAN Circular Economy Business Alliance and chairman of ARAIBA Sdn Bhd in the presence of Ms Helen Conefrey, Cooperation Advisor - Human Capital/Digital Transformation, EU Delegation to Lao PDR. Attendants included about 42 representatives from business sectors from different sectors such as Lao garment industry association, Lao furniture association, Lao handicraft association, hotel and restaurant association Lao PDR, Lao national construction association, Lao cement producer group and government agencies and related organizations in Vientiane and invited businesses founders which had adopted CE practices in their products, services and/or business processes.

⁶ <https://www.switch-asia.eu/resource/unlocking-the-circularity-opportunity-guidance-to-advance-circular-business/>

⁷ <https://www.switch-asia.eu/resource/circular-business-check-a-self-diagnostic-tool-for-small-and-medium-enterprises/>



Group photo of forum participants

Part 1: ACEBA LNCCI Partnership Launch

The workshop was conducted as per agenda for a full day start at 9:00 AM by welcome and remarks by Mr. Vanthong Sithikoun, vice president of LNCCI and Ms Helen Confrey, Cooperation Advisor - Human Capital/Digital Transformation, EU Delegation to Lao PDR.

Mr Vanthong Sithikoun, addressed that the circular economy is a pillar of the National Green Growth Strategy. The circular economy is not only an environmental imperative to address the climate and pollution crisis; it also offers a profound economic opportunity. It is recognised that adoption of CE in Laos could unlock a GDP growth and create jobs, while also helping achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2040. Nowadays, sustainable business development and transition to "Circular Economy" is not just another option, but is a necessity and a new business opportunity that will help our enterprises to prosper and grow, be innovative and act responsibly on their impact on environment and society. The launch of the ACEBA – LNCCI Circular Economy Partnership by signing MOU is a good sign to build a strong foundation for long-term cooperation.

Ms Helen Confrey remarked that EU Laos is working with Eurocham Laos in supporting development of circular economy, which contribute to the protection of environment and development of the economy as well. Therefore, circular economy is essential. This involves, but is not limited to, improving the recycling of materials. There should be more innovation to design waste out from products and service and drive the competitiveness of business. The circular economy transition is global, and EU is strongly supporting the circular economy transition in ASEAN. In Laos, government has also included circular economy into the national social-economy development plan. This creates value to community and at the same time protects the environment. Those activities need involvement of many parties, especially business sector which has important role in driving the circular economy transition. The EU SWITCH Asia Policy Support Component is collaborating with

with Lao government on activities related to the national social-economic development plan and supporting ACEBA to facilitate the adoption of Circular Economy by Laotian businesses.

Mr. Thomas Thomas then provided an introduction about the genesis and status of ACEBA – a business-led, ASEAN centric initiative to foster business leadership and action for the circular economy (www.aceba.co). ACEBA has been working on curation of knowledge products, including circular economy business cases and operational tools, knowledge sharing and networking. ACEBA collaborates with regional and national business organisations and welcomes LNCCI as its Country Lead for Laos. In this capacity LNCCI will serve as the local anchor and promotor of ACEBA, and work with ACEBA to facilitate the adoption of circular economy practices by Laotian businesses.

As an illustration of the diversity of circular business practices, a brief video was shown **Business for Circular Economy in Southeast Asia**⁸

Next the MOU was signed between LNCCI and ACEBA for promoting circular economy and responsible business activities in Laos. The MOU was signed by Mr. Vanthong Sitthikoun, vice president of LNCCI on behalf of LNCCI and Mr. Thomas Thomas, convenor (ACEBA), Senior Expert (SWITCH-Asia PSC) and Chairman (ARAIBA Sdn Bhd) on behalf of ACEBA witnessed by Ms Helen Conefrey, representing the EU Delegation to Lao PDR

Signing MOU, LNCCI-ACEBA, Mr. Vanthong Sitthikoun and Mr. Thomas Thomas



⁸ Accessible from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOPn3bM93PA>

And not forget the signing of the joining statements – inaugural members ACEBA Laos of the two businesses: Tai Baan Crafts and FL Green Mekong to marked the joining of ACEBA.



Signing of joining statements – Tai Baan Crafts (left) and FL Green Mekong (left) joined as Lao's inaugural ACEBA Participants.

Part 2: Circular Economy business and industry forum

Dr. Rene Van Berkel, Co-convenor (ACEBA), Senior Expert (SWITCH-Asia PSC) and International Faculty (Thammasat University) started the forum with an introductory presentation on: Getting your Business Ahead with Circular Economy⁹. Citing business cases from Lao and elsewhere in ASEAN he explained that businesses that adopt circular economy are performing well (with costs savings and new product and market opportunities), while doing good for environment and society. He further elaborated that business environment is changing, internationally, but also nationally, as governments adopt circular economy policies and multi-stakeholder platforms are driving circular economy best practices in key sectors like buildings, plastics, textiles and fashion. He also argued that whilst different interpretations for circular economy continue to exist, these are united by a common aspiration to zero out the use of virgin materials as well as the discharge of waste, through new, circular products, services, business activities and business models.

⁹ The presentation followed the contents of the ACEBA: Circular Economy Starter for East Asian Businesses, available from: <https://www.aceba.co/resource/getting-your-business-ahead-with-circularity-a-circular-economy-starter-for-east-asian-business/>



Speakers during the industry best practice sharing discussion 1, left to right, Mr. Khamseum Manivong, Ms Daovady Mahaxay and Ms Somchit Phankham, with Dr. Rene Van Berkel (moderator)

The following business panel with Ms Somchit Phankham, vice director of Tai Baan Craft. Ms Daovady Mahaxy, founder of Recraft and Mr. Khamseum Manivong, Director of Lao Chaleun Recycling Company Co., Ltd.

Ms Daovady Mahaxay: ReCraft¹⁰ repurposes textile waste into valuable textile products, preventing the loss of value and environmental impact of otherwise disposing the textile waste. The company collects fabric off cuts from tailor shops and garment makers in Vientiane Capital and uses artisans and community seamstresses to turn this into new products such as purses, bags etc. The clients are mostly young people and tourists, and can even select the piece of off-cut fabric for getting their desired product custom made. So, people are involved in the circular activities and it benefit to society. ReCraft believes that businesses can support each other in terms of lessons learnt on circular economy implementation and government could take active role in in promoting business involved in circular economy activities.

Mr. Khamseum Manivong: Lao Chaleun Recycling (LCR) company buys recyclable waste from waste collectors such as metal, plastics, waste vegetable oils, drink carton, up to 65 categories and sorts these at its workshops. The waste collectors are people and small business collect the recyclables from households, offices and junk shops. The waste is machine-sorted and the remaining combustible fractions are processed into Refuse Derived Fuel which is supplier to KCL cement company in Khammouane province. The company started in Vientiane Capital in 2000 but has since expanded to operate five sites around Lao PDR. The sorted recyclable fractions are on-sold to local manufacturers such as paper and plastics factories, and aluminium is exported to Thailand. KCL

¹⁰ See full ACEBA business case on ReCraft, available from: <https://www.aceba.co/resource/re-craft-laos-turning-handicraft-waste-into-valuable-circular-products/>

stressed upon the importance of government policy and legislation, to drive circular economy transition. Moreover, source segregation of recyclable waste by households and businesses will greatly improve recycling.

Ms Somchit Phankham: Tai Baan started to support artisans and create opportunities for women. Women are key resource for the creative economy within their community especially through weaving. Tai Baan promotes the use of natural materials such as cotton, natural silk and natural dyeing. Tai Baan products are the cultural ambassador for Laos. Tai Baan craft operates according to the fairtrade principles of World Fair Trade Organisation. It involves all the supplier from the upstream to downstream or from supplier to producer and at the end to consumers. Tai Baan focuses on enhancing quality of product. The products include home decoration items made to order. Tai Baan adopted green practices in particular in textile dying and this has benefitted the business. For circular economy, there is a need of involvement of young people and innovation.

A second panel discussion involved government and business stakeholders, particularly Mr. Nakhalin Vorasan, Deputy Director, ASEAN and Regional Cooperation Division, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Mr Viboon Sithimolada, Executive Board Member, Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Mr Stefano Pighin, Executive Director, European Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Lao PDR, moderated by Mr. Thomas Thomas.



Government and Business Reflections Panel (left to right) Mr. Nakhalin Vorasan (MAE), Mr Viboon Sithimolada (LNCCI), Mr Stefano Pighin (EuroCham).

Mr. Nakhalin Vorasan: Circular economy development is facilitated by the 2021 ASEAN Circular Economy Framework. Future efforts are needed to improve circular economy understanding and drive its implementation. Circular economy looks like an issue of reducing the waste but rather should start with circular design of products and business activities. The consumption side is also important - how are products consumed and disposed at the end of their use. For the production side, it also needs to consider how to make business profitable and create new business opportunity. Government, led by Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Industry and Commerce and Ministry of

Agriculture and Environment can drive implementation of circular economy through green public procurement MAE is pleased to be national focal point for circular economy development in Lao and for SWITCH Asia and looks forward to engage with ACEBA to drive circular economy in business sector.

Mr Viboon Sithimolada: LNCCI recognised the need for promotion of circular economy, which is now connected to the 10th National Social-economic development plan. It is expected that circular economy will create green jobs. Laos has potential of green business. For Lao, development is not from high carbon to low carbon, but rather expand economy while remaining low carbon through value added products and services. The purpose is not only to send quality product to Europe, but created value for businesses in Lao. Vietnamese business that can reduce the risk and export to Japan and Korea. Given the opportunity for business, circular economy should be prioritised for action from today. This requires strong coordination and collaboration between national government, ASEAN, ACEBA, business organisations and banks. There should be awareness to enhance understanding, and the opportunity for green business to increase productivity.

Stefano Pighin: European Chamber of Commerce and Industry Laos (ECCIL) is an agency working with a group of about 120 business in Laos and international, about 60% of which are SMEs. ECCIL facilitates an annual meeting of European businesses in Laos and recognises business excellence including on sustainability leadership. ECCIL welcomes the new collaboration of ACEBA and LNCCI, and ECCIL looks forward to collaborate with ACEBA on circular economy promotion in Laos. Generally, ECCIL works to bring lessons from EU to implement in Laos, encourage foreign company to work in Laos to enhance the capacity and competitiveness for Lao businesses for export. By doing this, Lao businesses have to opportunity to reach trade agreements and principles and they are able to access to those principles.

Part 3: Circular Business Starter Training

The afternoon was devoted to deliver of **Circular Business Starter Training for Small and Medium Enterprises**, which offered practical training based on ACEBA's business tools, in particular its implementation guide (Unlocking the circularity opportunity)¹¹ and the Circular Business Check¹².

The training was conducted by Dr. Rene Van Berkel and attended by local business representatives.

The training provided a comprehensive introduction to participants for developing circular economy practices. It included practical group tasks to develop participants' hands on understanding of the applicability of the circular business tools. As an introductory training, it generated request for follow up training activities.

¹¹ <https://www.switch-asia.eu/resource/unlocking-the-circularity-opportunity-guidance-to-advance-circular-business/>

¹² <https://www.aceba.co/resource/circular-business-check-a-self-diagnostic-tool-for-small-and-medium-enterprises/>



Impression of training exercises

3 Recommendations and Next Steps

Among other outcomes, the following could be highlighted:

At the end of the morning session, Mr. Vanthong Sittthikoun gave remarks, which could be the recommendation and next steps after the signing of the MOU. The remark was summarised as follow:

The activities of LNCCI are supporting the five-year strategic plan of government, which include circular economy activities. The Ministry of Industry and Commerce appointed LNCCI to reform in in alignment with the five-year strategic plans. LNCCI signed the MOU effective three years with ACEBA today. After the meeting today, it will translate the MOU into concrete work. LNCCI will coordinate with MAE, MOIC to adopt the workplan and implement. LNCCI suggested that it need a clear comprehensive and concrete supporting policy from government. To overcome the challenges, these issues need to be raised and discussed in Lao business forum to bargain with the development partners. This year, Lao government is supporting Start-up businesses, thus, they should be called for attention and in involve. For the best practise of circular economy for the big enterprises, the use RDF should be promoted.

4 Follow-up activities

After signing MOU, it is important to translate the MOU into a concrete work. The follow-up activities could be:

1. ACEBA and LNCCI should have a plan together to implement the circular economy activities, making use of available knowledge and operational tools of ACEBA to advance the objectives set in today's MOU
2. ACEBA continue to develop business cases with collaboration and support from LNCCI to mobilize businesses with relevant experiences.

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Acknowledgements

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