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Programme Guide

Circular Business Transition Programme

Unlocking SME Business Growth and Renewal with Circularity

November 2026 – March 2027

Indonesia and Philippines

Application **Link** Mentors/Mentees

A growing number of frontrunner businesses in Indonesia, the Philippines and elsewhere in Southeast Asia are performing well upon the adoption of circular economy (CE) practices. These businesses use materials, energy and water more efficiently, longer and repeatedly to save operational costs and/or created new product and market opportunities. Indeed, the World Economic Forum recognizes CE as a next driver of industrial competitiveness r for the Asia Pacific region. Even as business opportunities already exist and continue to expand, these may not be in plain sight, in particular for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), due to various reasons, that are being addressed through this Circular Business Transition programme.

Background

Southeast Asia has committed to a regional circular economy (CE) transition through the 2021 ASEAN Circular Economy Framework. This is complemented by national CE and Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) action plans, strategies, and roadmaps across the majority of ASEAN Member States, including in Indonesia through the National Circular Economy Roadmap 2025-2045 and in the Philippines through the National Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production. Achieving the CE-transition depends on active leadership from and implementation by businesses of circular products, services and business processes that are appropriate to their markets, capabilities and resources. Frontrunner companies across the region are already demonstrating tangible benefits, from savings on materials, energy, water, and disposal costs to access to new markets and to sustainable finance.

Circular Business

For business, CE means changing business activities, products and services, and possibly associated business models and value chains to minimize the use of new primary materials and minimize the generation of waste materials. Any business will need to determine its specific CE pathway to drive its own renewal and growth and create meaningful circularity impact. This generally involves a combination of – in any sequence -: taking stock of circular

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opportunities and risks to the company; setting a circular ambition and pathways; delivering a circular projects' portfolio; and integrating circularity in business processes.

Circular Business Transition Programme

Business mentoring is a proven approach for accelerating business growth and renewal, that typically succeeds by adopting a relatively narrow lens on one specific domain of company performance, e.g. quality, marketing, exports, etc. Here, mentoring is applied for the purpose of **exploring and unlocking the circularity business opportunity**. The mentor and mentee work together to scope, and initiate the implementation of, a strategic plan for CE-driven renewal and growth of the mentee's business.

Objectives

The overarching objective of the Circular Business Transition programme is to **identify, develop and prepare - for implementation - appropriate CE solutions for renewal and growth of the mentees' businesses**. This is done through close collaboration of the mentee (owner or operator of SME with an initial interest in CE) and the mentor (a senior business management professional), supported by circular business development experts.

The contributing objectives are:

- Provide an introduction and overview of CE and the opportunities and risks CE is creating for business
- Joint analysis and development of circular business opportunities that are appropriate for the mentees' businesses
- Create networking and business linkage opportunities relevant to circular solutions for mentees' businesses
- Promote and showcase the circular business initiatives and achievements of mentees' businesses

For **mentees**, thee programme offers the opportunity to head-start the circularity transition with the aim of renewal and growth of the mentee's business. Mentees benefit from national business insights and connections as well as from regionally grounded best circular business practices and tools.

For **mentors,** the programme is an opportunity to use their accumulated, formal and tacit, business knowledge to support renewal and growth of the mentee's business. Mentors have the opportunity to expand their business networks and will benefit from extensive familiarization with and guided application of leading CE practices and methods.

Target Group

The initial run of this Circular Business Transition programme will operate during November 2026 – March 2027 in separate, parallel groups in Indonesia and the Philippines, with each up to 15 mentees and 5 mentors (with national mentors working with 3-5 mentees, supported by the regional circular economy experts). The programme targets established businesses with mature markets that are interested to renew and grow towards circularity[1]. This includes both SMEs that have already participated in circular economy capacity building initiatives by ACEBA[2] and/or other partners, as well as SMEs that have not yet engaged with circular economy. Although CE applies to all sectors, first priority is given to the following sectors: textile and garments; leather and footwear; agri- and food processing; furniture and homewares; automotive; electronics; building and construction; and hospitality (including tourism).

Mentors will support the development of circular business opportunities for their assigned mentees' businesses, using their business insights and networks and the CE tools and insights provided to them. Mentors should therefore:

- Be senior industry experts, having a minimum of 15 years of experience covering management and management advisory roles in either Indonesia or the Philippines;
- Have prior experience as business mentor, preferably including for SMEs;
- Have demonstrated business networks and linkages relevant to SME sector within either Indonesia or the Philippines; and
- Show documented interest in circular economy and/or demonstrated experience in sustainable/responsible business, environment and/or ESG within either Indonesia or the Philippines.

Mentees will be supported by their assigned mentors and the CE experts to develop and prepare for implementation circular business opportunities for their business. Mentee should therefore:

- Be the current owner or operator/manager of an established business that reasonably meets the local- and/or sector-appropriate classification of a SME in either Indonesia or the Philippines; and
- Demonstrate interest in CE and commit to identifying and developing appropriate circular solutions for her/his business during the mentoring programme

Participation in the Circular Business Transition programme is free of charge for mentees. Pre-approved mentors can be remunerated against deliverables based on seniority and relevance of their expertise and prior experiences.

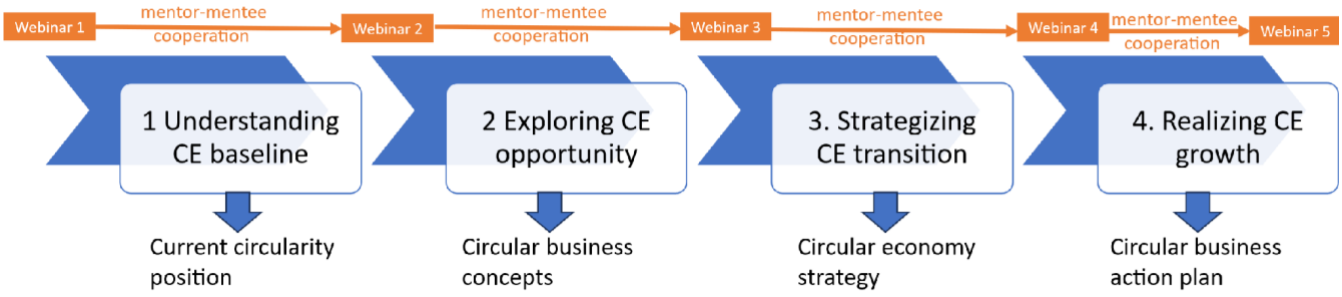
[1] A separate Circular Business Accelerator Programme specifically targeting start-ups with unique circular product or service solutions is being launched in parallel.

[2] Such as for example the pilot of ACEBA's Circular Business Check or Circular-by-Design Workshops.

Roadmap

The Circular Business Transition Programme will follow a four-step roadmap as shown below.

- **Step 1** (understanding the CE baseline) initiates the mentoring and establishes how the mentee's business is currently positioned for the CE transition.
- **Step 2** (exploring the CE opportunity) is aimed at scoping products, services and business activities for the mentee's business to effectively contribute to the CE.
- **Step 3** (strategizing the CE transition) involves analysis and prioritization of the circular business ideas to confirm CE quick wins (often involving copying or adapting circular solutions already trialed elsewhere) and CE game changers (ambitious CE solutions unique and transformative for the mentee's company).
- **Step 4** (realizing CE growth) focuses on mapping and mobilizing the means required for the CE transition particularly: markets; partners; and resources. Taken together, this creates the action plan for the mentee's company to implement its circular business strategy.



The mentoring kicks off with an introductory webinar (second half of November 2026), upon which the one-on-one mentoring starts for the duration of the programme. Three brief intermediary webinars are foreseen, with the dual purpose of taking stock of interim achievements and providing an introduction to the subsequent stage (tentatively mid-December 2026, mid-January 2027 and mid-February 2027). Moreover, a closure webinar is foreseen (late March 2027) to document and share mentoring achievements and officially close the mentee-mentor trajectory.

The mentoring is supported by a mentor toolkit with background and practical templates. This also serves to access further detailed operational tools and resources.

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About

The ASEAN Circular Economy Business Alliance (ACEBA) is a business-led, ASEAN-centric initiative created to foster business leadership and action on the circular economy. ACEBA was launched on 22 July 2024 in Jakarta (Indonesia) with the support of the ASEAN Secretariat, the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on MSMEs, the ASEAN Business Advisory Council, and the European Union Delegation to ASEAN, and it operates with technical advisory support from the EU SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component.

To date, ACEBA has developed a principles-based circular economy framework for businesses and curated some 100 CE business cases for companies in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. These represent different sectors and business sizes, and provide practical testimony that businesses are benefitting from their circularity initiatives in terms of operational costs savings, new product and market development and/or improved resilience, while doing good for planet and society. Informed by these business cases, European and international best practices and business engagements in the region, ACEBA is developing and piloting practical CE tools to support businesses, including Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

ACEBA partners with the **ASEAN Business Advisory Council** (ASEAN BAC) and the **East Asia Business Council** (EABC) to promote CE in particular among Small and Medium Enterprises through practical tools, training and advocacy.

KADIN Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry acts as the country lead for ACEBA in Indonesia. ACEBA further collaborates with **Rantai Tekstil Lestari** (RTL), **KADIN West Java** and the **Indonesia Business Council for Sustainable Development** (IBCSD) on advocacy, networking and capacity building.

The **Cebu Chamber of Commerce and Industry** (CCCI) acts as country lead for ACEBA in the Philippines and ACEBA partners with the **Global Compact Network Philippines** in advocacy and capacity building.

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