COP31 Circular Economy & Climate Action Side-Event

Advancing Circular Economy as a Strategic Climate Solution for Africa: Roadmap from COP31 to COP32

Date: 19 November

Time: 2:45pm – 4:15pm

Venue: African Pavillion

Organizers: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in partnership with the Panafrican Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the African Circular Economy Alliance (ACEA) Secretariat, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the African Union Commission (AUC), and the African Group of Negotiators on Climate Change (AGN).

1. Background and Rationale

The circular economy is increasingly recognized as an important pathway for reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with the production and consumption of materials, while strengthening resource efficiency, resilience, competitiveness and sustainable development. For Africa, circular economy approaches can also contribute to green industrialization, economic diversification, domestic value addition and decent job creation, while reducing exposure to resource and supply-chain vulnerabilities.

Africa has made important progress in establishing a continental policy foundation for circularity, notably through the African Union Circular Economy Action Plan (2024–2034). At the same time, the African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022–2032) provides a framework for advancing Africa's climate and resilience priorities. Greater alignment between these two agendas offers an opportunity to translate circular economy into practical climate action.

However, the contribution of circular economy remains insufficiently reflected in international climate discussions and negotiation priorities. Circular economy considerations are relevant to existing discussions on mitigation, adaptation and resilience, sustainable production and consumption, just transition, climate finance, technology and industrial transformation, but these linkages are not yet systematically articulated within Africa's climate diplomacy.

This creates an important opportunity in the lead-up to COP32 in Ethiopia. Africa can strengthen the visibility and strategic use of circular economy across existing climate priorities and demonstrate how circular approaches can deliver tangible climate and development outcomes.

COP31 provides an important moment to advance this discussion. With Zero Waste set as an Action Agenda item, COP31 can serve as a platform to take stock of emerging international developments, strengthen the evidence and policy narrative for circular economy, and identify practical areas where African institutions, negotiators, governments, development partners and the private sector can work together ahead of COP32.

The proposed side event would therefore bring together the AUC, AfDB, ECA, ACEA Secretariat, UNDP, PACJA and the AGN on climate change alongside other relevant stakeholders, to examine how circular economy can be more effectively mainstreamed into Africa's climate priorities and translated into concrete policy, investment and implementation opportunities between COP31 and COP32.

2. Objective

The side event aims to strengthen the positioning of circular economy within Africa's climate agenda by identifying practical entry points for its mainstreaming across climate negotiations, policy processes, financing and implementation, while building momentum from COP31 to COP32.

Specific objectives

The event will:

- Strengthen the understanding of the contribution of circular economy to Africa's climate mitigation, adaptation, resilience and sustainable development priorities.
- Identify strategic entry points for mainstreaming circular economy within existing African climate negotiation priorities and relevant UNFCCC processes.
- Strengthen coordination among the AGN, African Union institutions, development finance institutions, UN entities, development partners and other stakeholders working at the intersection of circular economy and climate action.
- Build momentum towards COP32 by identifying priority actions and partnerships that can be advanced between COP31 and COP32.

3. Key messages

The discussion could be structured around three core messages:

- **Circular economy is a climate solution.**

Circular approaches can contribute to mitigation, adaptation and resilience while addressing emissions and environmental pressures associated with production and consumption systems.

- **Circular economy can reinforce Africa's existing climate and development priorities.**

It can support green industrialization, economic diversification, resource efficiency, regional value chains, food and water security, resilience and decent employment.

- **COP31 should be a steppingstone towards COP32.**

The period between COP31 and COP32 should be used to strengthen evidence, develop policy and negotiating messages, build the capacity of African negotiators, identify investment opportunities and establish partnerships capable of supporting implementation. The immediate opportunity will be to identify where circular economy can strengthen existing African climate priorities and negotiation positions across relevant UNFCCC workstreams.

4. Expected outcomes

The event is expected to:

- Build a shared understanding among African and international stakeholders of the strategic role of circular economy in delivering Africa's climate priorities.
- Identify priority entry points for integrating circular economy within existing climate negotiation and policy processes.
- Generate inputs for the AGN's technical and negotiation work between COP31 and COP32.
- Strengthen coordination among the AGN, AUC, ECA, AfDB, ACEA, UNDP, PACJA and other partners.
- Establish a set of priority actions and engagements between COP31 and COP32, including relevant African and international policy forums.
- Build momentum towards COP32 as a platform for demonstrating African-led circular economy solutions and their contribution to climate action and sustainable development.

5. Agenda

Total duration: 90 minutes

Moderator of the side event: **Gloria Majinga**, Malawian environmental advocate and Policy Officer for Tax, Natural Resources and Sustainable Climate Finance at Tax Justice Network Africa (TJNA)

Segment	Duration	Focus
Welcome and Opening Remarks	10 min	High-level opening and framing of the importance of circular economy for Africa's climate and development priorities, including green transformation, industrialization, and just transition policy. Name of the representative: **Dr. Eng. Festus Ng'eno,** Principal Secretary, State Department for Environment and Climate Change, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Forestry, Government of Kenya
Setting the Scene	15 min	Circular Economy as a Strategic Climate Solution for Africa: evidence, climate-development linkages, current positioning within the UNFCCC process, and strategic entry points for advancing circular economy within Africa's climate negotiation priorities Name of the presenter: **Dr. Portia Adade Williams**, Senior Researcher Scientist/Lead Author – IPCC AR7, AGN on Climate Change
Panel discussion: Mainstreaming Circular Economy in Africa's Climate Agenda – From COP31 to COP32	40 min	AUC: Implementation of the AU Circular Economy Action Plan and strengthening of its alignment with the AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy. Name of the panelist: **Dr. Jihane El Gaouzi**, Head of Sustainable Environment Division, AUC

		AfDB: Financing circular economy solutions as part of Africa's climate action, green industrialization and economic transformation Name of the representative: **Davinah Milenge Uwella**, Chief Programme Coordinator, Climate Change and Green Growth, AfDB
		PACJA: Highlighting how circular economy approaches can support economic diversification, green industrialization, local value addition, and a just transition. Name of the panelist: **Faith Ngige**, HSC-National Coordinator, PACJA
		UNDP: Mainstreaming circular economy into NDCs, NAPs and national development planning, and strengthening country-level implementation Name of the panelist: **Daisy Mukarakate**, Regional Climate Policy Advisor, UNDP Regional Service Centre for Africa
Discussion with the Audience	15 min	Reflections, questions and concrete proposals from countries, negotiators, development partners, private sector and civil society
Conclusions and Way Forward	10 min	From COP31 to COP32: priority actions, partnerships and opportunities to strengthen circular economy within Africa's climate agenda Name of the representative: **Tracy Kajumba**, Inter-regional Advisor, Climate Policy and Governance, Climate Change, Food Security and Natural Resources Division, UNECA