Opportunities for Circular Economy in India
SEED India, IDOBRO, and RISE Infinity Foundation

Introduction

The RISE World Summit, held across 28-29 January 2021, was a unique concept of a relay conference across time zones, starting with Japan and ending in the Americas. Adhering to the format of *no panels and no presentation* set for the entire summit, the roundtables were a core activity convened to have breakthrough interactions and encourage collaboration around the challenges the world faces.

The theme of the RISE World Summit 2021, "Beyond Boundaries, Search UNITY, Find OpportUNITY ", was based on the backdrop of the pandemic to search for interventions and innovations that will truly make this the Decade of Action to achieve the SDGs. The Decade of Action calls for everyone and especially young people to work towards the 17 global goals set by the UN.

Roundtable Context

Eco-inclusive enterprises in several sectors already up-cycle conventional waste materials into useful products and facilitate the circulation of materials through society. Thus they have a key role in the transition from linear to circular economy. The roundtable was attended by 136 participants from 12 countries, deliberating on the ecosystem required to facilitate circular economy entrepreneurship in India, examining gaps and requirements in knowledge support as well as in funding and finances.

SEED was founded at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg by UN Environment, UNDP and IUCN as a global partnership for action on sustainable development and the green economy. SEED is based on the understanding that the promotion of social and environmental entrepreneurship is pivotal for environmentally friendly and socially inclusive development and poverty reduction.
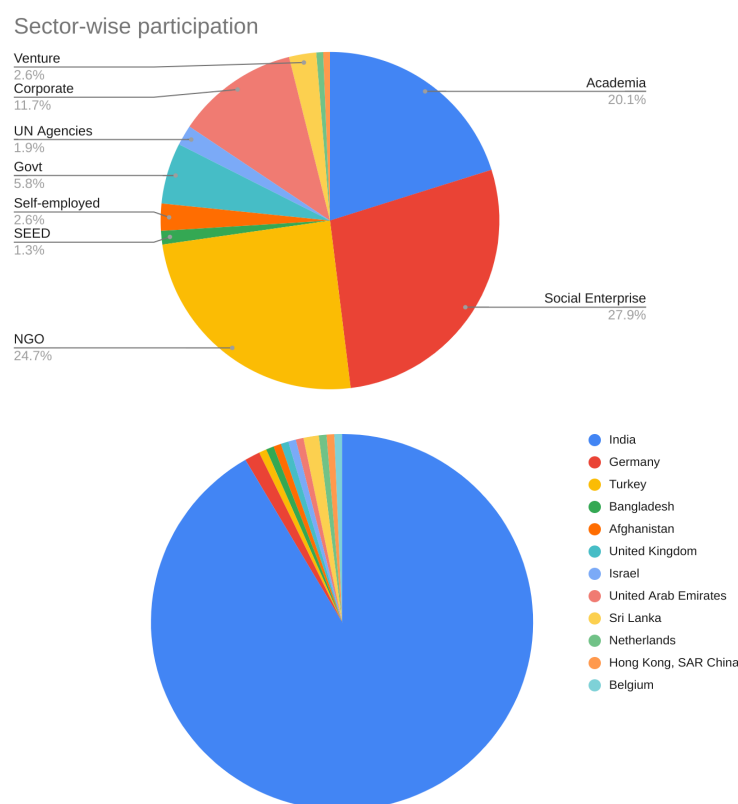
SEED works directly with growing enterprises and aspiring entrepreneurs in their enterprise support programmes to strategise, optimise and award achievements in eco-inclusive entrepreneurship. It's ecosystem building activities fortify a global network of local business development services providers and offer platforms for coordination between key local, national and international stakeholders.

Participants

136 participants from 12 countries and across the wide spectrum of age groups and profiles attended the roundtable as can be seen below.

- Representatives from 43 organizations
- Heads of social enterprises, venture funds, institutions, foundations, corporates, and government officials from initiatives that support social enterprises and innovations.

Sector-wise participation

Sector	%
Academia	20.1%
Social Enterprise	27.9%
NGO	24.7%
SEED	1.3%
Self-employed	2.6%
Govt	5.8%
UN Agencies	1.9%
Corporate	11.7%
Venture	2.6%

Countries: India, Germany, Turkey, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, United Kingdom, Israel, United Arab Emirates, Sri Lanka, Netherlands, Hong Kong, SAR China, Belgium

Moderators

- **Mr Amarnath Munnolimath** - Project Manager, Sustainability, Adelphi - SEED
- **Karon Shaiva** - Chief Impact Officer & Managing Director of Idobro Impact Solutions and Managing Trustee of RISE Infinity Foundation

Experts

- **Linde Wolters** - Head of Communications, Co-lead on Policy and Advocacy at Adelphi – SEED
- **Prasad Modak** - Executive President Environmental Management Centre LLP and Director Ekonnect Knowledge Foundation
- **Sanjiv Bhatia** - Founder and Executive Director SUSTENT group
- **A.Kathiresan** - Founder of Ecohike & Syndicate Impex
- **Aditya Siroya** - Co-Founder & Chief Impact Officer of Repurpose Global
- **Piyush Dhawan** - Co-Founder of The Circular Collective
- **Rachna Arora** - Team Leader (GIZ) - EU supported Resource Efficiency Initiative for India (EU-REI) and Circular Economy Solutions Preventing Marine Litter
- **Shashank Nimkar** - Founder, Earth Tatva - Recycled Ceramics

Key Discussion points

The session sought to bring all categories of stakeholders to the roundtable with a focus on the following:

- Ecosystem required to facilitate circular economy entrepreneurship in India, examining gaps and requirements in knowledge support as well as in funding and finances

- Common challenges in Circular Economy Entrepreneurship in India working to close the loop for resource-efficient production and waste management
- Best practices, solutions, interventions, and innovations to cut down on waste and pollution, and extend the useful life of materials and products.
- SEED Replicator program for entrepreneurs looking to share innovative ideas, build partnerships and jump-start their own enterprise.

> ❝
>
> Making consumers believe that the product is made of true circular economy is a very big challenge. People don't know the impact that they are creating while purchasing. Changing a mindset of a consumer is the first and foremost thing for any enterprises or any manufacturing industry or for any product to be a successful one
>
> A.Kathiresan - Founder, Ecohike
> Circular Economy at RISE World Summit 2021

Challenges

Access and capacity

- Access to high-quality and professional capacity-building instruments to eco-inclusive enterprises in India (Linde Wolters, SEED)
- India being a growing economy, is facing challenges such as growing urbanization and resource scarcity (Linde Wolters, SEED)
- Building up a team of people who are passionate about the cause (Mr. Shashank, Earth Tatva)
- In circular economies a lot of value adds have to happen at the local level to create local jobs, but there is an inverted structure in India. Local skills don't get that much respect and payment for this model to thrive (Sanjiv Bhatia, SUSTENT Asia)

Recycling and refurbishing

- The whole focus is on waste recycling, and things like repairs and refurbishing are forgotten (Dr. Prasad Modak, Ekonnect)
- If one wants to extract primary resources and use virgin materials, instead one can use reused material, reducing the cost of the product (Sanjiv Bhatia, SUSTENT Asia)

- Changing the mindset of a consumer to opt for recycle and refurbished products (Katrina Hassan, Ecohike)
- A major problem that the rural tourism industry has seen is managing food-waste that gets generated in the rural areas (Gitanjali Kaur)

Governance and Policy

- There is a need at the policy and framework level where the government will fit in strongly. The two main issues faced by most eco-inclusive enterprises and other foundations are capacity-building of incubators and accelerators, and team building; Government policy-making for funding and mass-migration is required (Mr. Punit, Advisor, IPE Global)

Ecosystem

- We need to rapidly evolve from circular economies to a regenerative ecosystem. Unless we make a leap from economy to the ecosystem, a circular economy would remain what it is today; Lofty ideals but very limited impact on the ground. (Mr. Kumar Moorthy Iyer, QBL Initiative)
- One of the major reasons why people avoid becoming a part of the circular economy is profit sharing (Mr. Kumar Moorthy Iyer, QBL Initiative)

> 66
>
> We are still living and working in a me mentality. If I have to share my profits with someone else I take home less; i'm not interested. We need to set aside this thought about me before the we, that's why I say we need to move away from being an economy and start thinking of ourselves as an ecosystem. If the ecosystem thrives we thrive.
>
> Kumar Moorthy Iyer- QBL Initiative, India
> Circular Economy at RISE World Summit 2021

Capabilities & Solutions

Need for collaborations and campaigns

- Collaborations are critical within sectors and SMEs; with financing agencies to deliver products, and with the government for the right policy (Linde Wolters, SEED)
- Promoting and supporting circular economy enterprises, capacity building and collaborations can lead to an economy that's restorative and regenerative (Linde Wolters, SEED)
- Roll out some campaigns and wellness videos to spread awareness regarding the importance of nature and the environment to consumers (Katrina Hassan, Ecohike)

● The solution would be to foster and highlight innovations in water, energy, and traditional waste recycling methods. (Rachna Arora, GIZ)

SEED Replicator Program

● Aspiring entrepreneurs are paired with established enterprises that have successfully implemented eco-inclusive business models in other locations. During the Replicator process, The entrepreneur is equipped with hands-on tools and business blueprints which are proven to be profitable, which deliver combined environmental, social and economic benefits, and are easily adapted to different contexts. (Amar M, SEED)

Capacity building and mapping

● Repair servicing sector is very critical and has innovation potential, and also helps create local jobs. (Dr. Prasad Modak, Ekonnect)

● Planning and mapping is required so that various stakeholders can help create a conducive environment for eco-inclusive enterprises and therefore achieve SDGs. (Mr. Punit, Advisor, IPE Global, Jaipur, India)

● It is necessary to inculcate the mindset of an innovator to ensure & ideate innovation at the grass-roots levels. If we can get the teams energized and involved, we will see a snowballing effect of the economy into an energetic and engaged ecosystem. (Mr. Kumar Moorthy Iyer, QBL Initiative)

● Capacity building and job creation in villages will provide youth with a local ecosystem kind of urbanization we are having in the cities. This will curb the drift of young people moving to the urban cities, which will address multiple problems. (Mr. Punit, Advisor, IPE Global, Jaipur, India)

> 66
>
> We keep thinking only about waste recycling. I think we probably need to open up the canvas again, more explicitly, so that we go in a full circle not missing repairs, refurbishing, and product design.
>
> Prasad Modak - Ekonnect, India
> Circular Economy at RISE World Summit 2021

Governance and Policy

● Alignment of different ministries and industries to work together to achieve certain goals is most definitely an effective way to go forward and create awareness about the need for more cross-sector collaborations and generating employment

opportunities. This will make India a product manufacturer and the production will move to India, which will help the economy. (Rachna Arora, GIZ)

Ownership

- Companies should take accountability for becoming more self-sustained, indicators and sustainability index should be introduced in each organization, climate change affecting development, gender-specific roles and how they affect sustainability in organizations and plastic-waste management systems.
- It is very important to look into more resource-efficient solutions, so we can get more VCs involved. Apart from institutional funding, getting leverage from the CSR funds is more on scaling and innovation, which are also important parts of this enabling framework.

Collaborations

- GIZ has worked to create policies with governments around water, energy, and renewables, and on traditional waste recycling methods. (Rachna Arora, GIZ)
- IPE Global has worked with marginalized and rural youth in Jaipur, connecting them to skilling jobs, the circular economy and the local opportunities at the ground level in village blocks.

Insights from Mentimeter

Mentimeter tool was used to poll the audience to understand how organizations would want to collaborate with SEED India.

- 22 organizations from social enterprise, corporate, academic and NGO sectors were looking to collaborate with SEED India (for example, EcoHike, Save The Children, Ekonnect, EMC, IPE Global, CYDA, Sustainability development society Kerala, Bowtruckle, Earth Tatva, Jan Vikas Samiti, Nisarg Yug Environment solutions, QBL initiative, St. Mira's College for Girls, BIRSA Agricultural University, VidSmart

> ❝
> We should incorporate the introduction of circular economy at an education level, because that is where a lot of innovation comes and there's a lot of potential for the new. It happens that many students are really unaware about all these topics and aspects, and then they just moved to the conventional professional opportunities. So once we have these young individuals starting their thought process in this direction at an early age, I think it's going to be a lot more easier in the long run, for all the stakeholders.
>
> Shashank - Earth Tatva
> Circular Economy at RISE World Summit 2021

Koncepts, Mary Sustainable Futures, The New Millennium Listeners Institute and Reliance Industries Limited)

- Academic institutions were looking for mentorship programs, academic projects and incubation opportunities
- Rural entrepreneurship programs were requested to foster rural livelihood
- Innovation seeding and incubation opportunities in the fields of waste management, textiles, water recycling, waste material recycling, renewable energy and green buildings.
- Seed funding and capacity building for start-ups/ business ideas in collaboration with existing incubators and ventures
- Sector- specific education modules leveraging ideas like Quadruple Bottom Lines (QBL)

Way forward

> 66
>
> Inclusive enterprises have a key role to play in the circular economy. India has a key opportunity to become a more circular economy.
>
> Linde Wolters- SEED, Belgium
> Circular Economy at RISE World Summit 2021

Indians are serial problem solvers and innovators; India's future as a circular economy is not only bright but is extremely critical. Collaborations are the need of the hour to target and solve real-time issues which are faced by entrepreneurs, and building a sustainable circular economy. Designing and co-creating multi-stakeholder programs, involving SMEs, corporates, NGOs, local Governments, academic institutions, community and youth will provide clarity, foster innovation and bring stakeholders together. Some programs and discussion topics identified are

- Importance of the economy, ecology, and environment, especially in schools among children and young adults
- Skilling programs and capacity building workshops for enterprises, villages, youth and government bodies
- Waste upcycling/ recycling management systems
- Profit-sharing among stakeholders

- Gender-specific roles impacting sustainable development
- Scale and criteria to measure the sustainability of organizations
- Policy framework by the Government to support eco-inclusive organizations

NOTE:

For a more detailed understanding of the session outcomes, kindly access a complete recording at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBaDpjBoMLU

A LinkedIn group has been created by RISE World Summit Team to foster collaboration between participants. https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12494977/