

Squaring the Circle

Norm Diffusion in Sustainable Development; The Case of
Circular Economies.



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Abstract

Environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change are critical issues currently facing modern society; in order to mitigate against further damage and in attempt to reverse human-induced effects, a paradigmatic shift is required. Sustainable development functions as the dominant discourse in guiding such mechanisms as the circular economy in achieving the conservation of the planet. This radical innovation remains a largely unknown alternative to the current linear system, despite actively addressing economic, environmental and societal spheres. Hence, this study aims to understand the international diffusion of the circular economy as a norm, analysing the salient actors in actioning this. Embedded within International Relations, the constructivist perspective of norm diffusion theory is employed in order to investigate norm emergence, cascading, internalisation and the behaviours of actors. Positioned within this, the sustainable entrepreneurship theory is engaged with, highlighting the characteristics and motivations of the norm entrepreneur in driving this diffusion. Through a descriptive, instrumental case study this research aggregates carefully selected, coded and analysed documentary data, in ascertaining the key actors within the circular economy ecosystem and the position of the Global South. The discussion points to the sustainable entrepreneur as a pivotal actor in this process, setting a trajectory for future research.

Key Words: Circular Economy, Norm Diffusion, Sustainable Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Development, Constructivism, Development Cooperation, Actors, Global South

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List of Abbreviations

CE/s	Circular Economies
EMF	Ellen MacArthur Foundation
IOs	International Organisations
IR	International Relations
SD	Sustainable Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SE	Sustainable Entrepreneurship
SMEs	Small & Medium Sized Enterprises

1. Introduction

The Anthropocene is the most recent geological epoch that has contributed to irreversible and unparalleled rates of human-induced biodiversity loss, natural resource depletion and climate change (Benson & Craig, 2014). This term has become a buzzword amongst the environmental community, inciting international discussions and targeted development goals in mitigation attempts; however, there has been an obvious gap between policy and practise. Conceptualising actionable frameworks is difficult with the complexity and multifaceted dimensions of structural systems that govern the lives of human beings. However, one concept pursuing environmental stewardship and sustainability is the notion of Sustainable Development (SD), which has become the overarching strategy in implementing sustainable practises. Various mechanisms have been established to accomplish a transformation toward instilling these sustainable values, actions and norms into society. One such mechanism is the Circular Economy (CE), an approach that challenges the current linear-economic model and neoliberal principles of the reigning capitalist system. However, CE discourse is often Western-centric and inconsiderate of the Global South's role – an integral part of the globalised system, which must be incorporated in global discussions if sustainability is to become the universal norm. This motivates the need for research pertaining to the emergence of CEs, their spread and implementation. The ensuing thesis aims to understand the key actors driving this norm diffusion through the employment of an instrumental single case study, engendering a unique discussion grounded in norm diffusion and sustainable entrepreneurship theory. Applying the Miles and Huberman framework, a detailed account of the methodological process used in this research provides transparency and reliability. A concluding thematic analysis demonstrates the actors and the role of developing nations in establishing a grounded discussion, seeking to answer the research question and inform future studies.

1.1 Aim & Research Question

The CE is a multifaceted approach comprised of numerous variables; analysing who the core actors are in impelling this diffusion is imperative in comprehending the barriers and drivers toward its implementation. The notion of the CE as a norm remains largely unobserved, yet is an integral aspect in comprehending how actors can promote the adoption of this model within the international system, challenging

dominant structures and advocating its replacement with sustainable processes. Drawing parallels, identifying patterns and conceptually analysing this process through the use of norm diffusion theory assists in understanding current social constructions and interdisciplinary collaborations. The constructivist approach to norm diffusion theory typically explores the behaviours of actors, their motives and the role they play in the norm diffusion process. Through the exploration of the social dimension as foundational in the politicisation of this approach, this study aims to contribute the academic field in a unique and pragmatic way. As a result of this objective, the research question is posed as:

Who are the salient actors in internationally diffusing the circular economy as a norm?

1.2 Thesis Disposition

After presenting the aim and scope of this thesis, a Conceptual Framework (2.) will be provided in order to introduce the concepts of SD, CEs and norms. This will lead to the following section whereby Preliminary Studies (3.) are presented to determine derivations and contemporary conceptualisations of the theory and empirical evidence on various guidelines promoting the CE. The succeeding section will present the chosen theories in a succinct Theoretical Framework (4.), providing a theoretical foundation for the analytical discussion. A detailed Methodological approach (5.) to the study will be stated in the next section, examining the research design, data collection, data analysis, biases and limitations of the study. This section precedes the Analysis (6.), which will be thematically structured in order to present a concise and valid discussion based on the synthesised information. The analysis will conclude with a corroborated argument grounded in theory, presenting a summary of the findings and a trajectory for further research. Finally, the thesis will summarise the aim, findings and results in the Conclusion (7.0), in order to reiterate the key results of the study.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Sustainable Development

An interdisciplinary and highly complex concept, SD is posited on three primary pillars; the environment, society and the economy (Elliott, 2012, p.16). The most commonly cited definition stems from the *Brundtland Report*, stating, “SD is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations to meet their own needs” (Murray et al, 2017). Archetypically, contemporary definitions converge at points of reference to natural capital and resource management, often referring to this concept as a political strategy reflective of the broader societal goals of global environmental stewardship through prolonging ecological amenities and reconciling environmental issues with development, today and in the future (Benson & Craig, 2014; Brand, 2012; Nitoaia, 2018). This synthesised conceptualisation will act as the grounding definition of SD for the remainder of the thesis. Through the persistence of neo-liberal governance and the perception of ‘business as usual’, some researchers question whether sustainable practises can be achieved in a system embedded in over-consumption, competitive markets, economic growth and globalisation (Ravenhill, 2017, p.361; Benson & Craig, 2014; Murray et al, 2017). In order for SD to be effected, issues of basic human rights, employment, poverty, environmental degradation and development must be tackled (Rogers et al, 2008, p.50 & 51). As an overarching approach, SD remains principally valuable; the consensus among environmental experts emphasises the need for participatory decision-making, sustainable business models, transformative policies, strategic assessment and new indicators beyond GDP in ensuring longevity of people and planet (Heinrichs, 2013; Benson & Craig, 2014; Caradonna, 2018).

2.2 The Circular Economy

2.2.1 A History

Whilst the principles of CEs have been present for centuries, the concept was initially presented during the 1970s with the intent to encourage a non-wasteful

society. Within a contemporary context, this approach has become a trend and goal for progressive leaders urgently driving the sustainability agenda, catalysed by increasing environmental catastrophes (Circle Economy, 2018). At the forefront of contemporary scholarly, institutional and societal discussion, discourses on the CE converge upon the urgency for a revision of existing systems, structures and paradigms. Challenging the current linear economic model of make-waste-dispose, this innovative model addresses the three pillars of SD acting as an economic enabler of competitiveness through resource efficiency, a facilitator in transforming social values and behaviours and seeks to mitigate against further diminishing natural capital (Batista et al, 2018; Esposito et al, 2015; Korhonen et al, 2018a). The concept of CEs, whilst a viable alternative in reversing the effects of calamitous damages, remains an ambiguous field lacking in evidence-based research leading to the induction of much debate and contention.

2.2.2 A Conceptualisation

Still an immature field, it lacks theoretical grounding instead drawing from an assortment of concepts such as; SD, the green economy, life cycle thinking, the sharing economy and eco-design (see Appendix, Table 1) (Circle Economy, 2018). Due to this absence of theory, the concept of CE has no singular conceptualisation from which scholars, leaders and practitioners can either draw from or point toward. The Ellen McArthur Foundation (EMF) is a leading agency in the promotion of circular thinking providing the most referenced definition, principles and frameworks for CE implementation and emphasising the underpinning principles of value preservation, resource optimisation and system effectiveness (Circle Economy, 2018; Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2014). EMF defines this as, “ [CE is] an industrial system that is restorative or regenerative by intention and design. It replaces the “end-of-life” concept with restoration, shifts towards the use of renewable energy, eliminates the use of toxic chemicals, which impair reuse, and aims for the elimination of waste through the superior design of materials, products, systems, and within this, business models” (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2014). A clear visualisation of the CE as created by EMF depicts these principles, the flow of the biological and technical cycles and the action in prolonging these processes (See Figure 2.1 below).

Fundamentally, a circular economy must entail the sustainable use of raw materials, closed-loop manufacturing/production processes, the encouragement of assistive market environments, transparent circular supply chains and sustainable methods of consumption (Circle Economy, 2018). Current definitions tend to emphasise particular industries, logistical points or dimensions at the neglect of other integral factors or alternatively, are tailored to a researchers' argument, agenda or perspective. Evident, also, is the common referral to the 3R's (recycling, restoration and reuse), at the neglect of incorporating a consumer's perspective, a 'level of analysis' consideration (micro-meso-macro), developing nations, social equity or time perceptions (Kirchherr et al, 2017). In order to foster cumulative knowledge on the field, Kirchherr et al (2017) established a synthesised and comprehensive conceptualisation of CE, this definition states, " A circular economy describes an economic system that is based on business models which replace the end-of-life' concept with reducing, alternatively reusing, recycling and recovering materials in production/distribution and consumption processes, thus operation at the micro level (products, companies, consumers), meso level (eco-industrial parks) and macro level (city, region, nation and beyond), with the aim to accomplish sustainable development, which implies creating environmental quality, economic prosperity and social equity, to the benefit of current and future generations". In preparing for this study, the above definition has been the most holistic definition and will, therefore, act as the foundation for the remainder of this thesis.

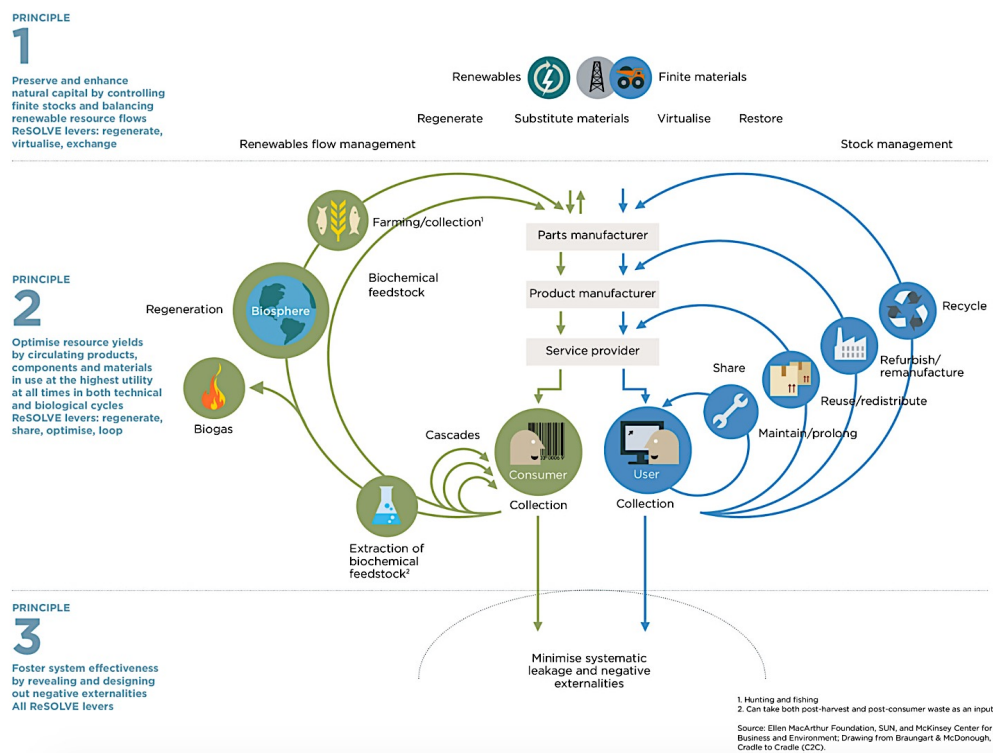


FIGURE 2.1 | A VISUALISATION OF THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY ACCORDING TO EMF (ELLEN MACARTHUR FOUNDATION, 2014)

2.3 Norms & Norm Diffusion

Within the academic sphere norms are difficult to define, with scholars identifying various typologies according to their respective disciplines; each contributing seemingly divergent explanations (Salimi et al, 2018). The most foundational conceptualisation of norms pertaining to the constructivist perspective, established by political scientists *Finnemore & Sikkink* (1998), reads, "[norm as a] standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity" - this translates to, the archetypal behaviours of actors within a given norm community (shared ideologies), as expected by society. Norms are considered to be continuous entities gaining support through the justification for action and the assignment of responsibility (Winston, 2017). There exist a multitude of norm categories, each distinctive in their prescription; these infer different priorities and measures in explaining norm emergence, promulgation and embodiment (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Winston, 2017).

Norm diffusion, further elaborated in the Theoretical Framework (4.), refers to the dissemination of a norm throughout society, conceptualised by *Finnemore & Sikkink* (1998) through a simplistic process termed the 'Norm Life Cycle'. This model proposes a three-step, linear process beginning with norm emergence, followed by norm cascading and concluding with norm internalisation (see Figure 2.2 below) (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

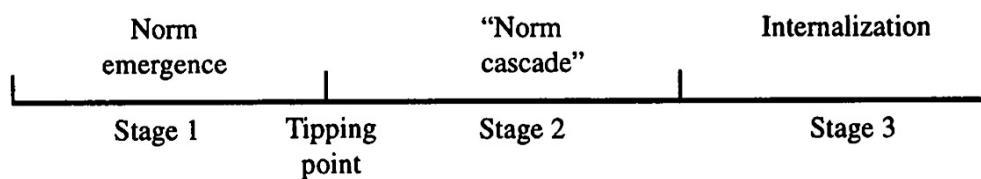


FIGURE 2.2 | A VISUALISATION OF A NORM'S LIFE CYCLE (FINNEMORE & SIKKINK, 1998)

Winston (2017) explains the norm as being comprised of constitutive and constraining aspects, which can be bridged through the tripartite model of contemporary norms perceived as, "If [problem] is, [value] suggests [behaviour]". The norm, then, stands as the nexus of this model with the problem referring to the issue at hand driven by a value that provides moral weight to the argument, in turn actioning a justified behaviour to practise the value (Winston, 2017). This visualisation of norm emergence, the first stage of the 'Norm Life Cycle', guides research in exploring the mechanisms, motives and manifestation of norms and their relationship with actors (Salimi et al, 2018; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). After reaching a tipping point, whereby a critical mass of individuals or states have

been persuaded, the second stage of norm cascading begins (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). This stage sees norm diffusion shift from individual, local or regional actors to states and institutions, who rapidly cascade the international spread and adoption of a norm. At the tail-end of this process is norm internalisation, whereby a norm is ratified within law, industry or government and universalised to become the expected societal behaviour (Finnermore & Sikkink, 1998). *Finnemore & Sikkink's* (1998) explanation is an effective conceptual tool in understanding the process of norm diffusion and will be used as a key theoretical structure in grounding the discussion.

3. Preliminary Studies

3.1 International Relations & Constructivism

The discipline of International Relations (IR) is comprised of many theories; a sub-group termed critical IR theory, refers to the cluster of theories including constructivism, postmodernism, neo-marxism and feminism (Wendt, 1995). These theories are combined as they converge on the understanding that world politics is a social construction, shifting from predominant perspectives which emphasise materialism and are absent of recognising the agendas and identities of actors (Wendt, 1995; Landolt, 2004). This discipline, otherwise called political science, is the overarching study of sub-disciplines such as the International Political Economy (IPE), concerned with the dynamics of the past, present and future interrelationship between politics and economics (Broome, 2014, p.6).

The constructivist perspective of IPE aims at understanding the roles of norms, values and ideation within this process, assuming these political practises and outcomes are moulded by the intersubjectivness of social reality (Broome, 2014, p.24). These assumptions lead to contention with the dominant theoretical perspectives of liberalism, realism and Marxism, who posit their assumptions on the causal significance of norms in constructing outcomes (Broome, 2014, p.25). Ontologically, these are understood through the examination of social processes and actors' identities, their associated interests and the constitutive role of their shared ideas in defining social actions (Broome, 2014, pp.18, 24 & 25; Ravenhill, 2017, p.278; Hoffman, 2010). Studying the interactions which constitute the social structure of international politics, encompasses three distinctive aspects; knowledge sharing, actions and material resources (Wendt, 1995). These attributes are similarly referred to when analysing norm diffusion from the constructivist perspective, which has become a useful tool in comprehending the constitutive process of social construction and in challenging assumptions that the international system is devoid of a social dimension.

3.2 Chronology of Norm Scholarship

The first wave of norm scholarship sought to challenge the dominant theories of IR, namely rationalism and materialism, laying a theoretical basis in approaching world politics by incorporating the abandoned social dimension (Hoffman, 2010). In so doing, this wave was mainly occupied by empirically demonstrating and convincing sceptics that norms were relevant to study, contributing to understanding international outcomes (Hoffman, 2010; Müller & Wunderlich, 2013). These initial considerations viewed the complexity of social norms as static entities adhering to bounded strictures; overly simplified for the purpose of facilitating the dialogue and inquiry with contending theorists (Hoffman, 2010). During this wave, researchers tended to “freeze” norms in order to categorically analyse them, assuming norms to be emergent of the beliefs and actions of actors, engendering intersubjective standards of appropriateness (Hoffman, 2010; Müller & Wunderlich, 2013). However, these narrow assumptions neglected various dimensions of norm emergence and change, instigating a shift in understanding and initiating the second wave of norm education.

The second wave of norm study in IR shifted to consider intraconstructivist debates, emphasising socialisation, norm dynamics, compliance and new theorisations (Hoffman, 2010; Müller & Wunderlich, 2013). Once norms were considered to be more than linear and fixed entities, constructivist studies provided insight into the interests of actors, their interpretation and agency in relation to norm diffusion and norm contestation in problematising factors of norm dynamics (Hoffman, 2010; Müller & Wunderlich, 2013). More generally, social structures were considered both constraining and opportune in establishing action of which agency either maintained the status quo or incited change; this approach was epitomised as the ‘norm entrepreneur’ (Müller & Wunderlich, 2013). These agency-based perspectives highlighted the norm entrepreneurs’ use of material and ideational sources in promoting norms via mechanisms such as coercion, knowledge sharing and emulation processes (Müller & Wunderlich, 2013). The study of norms as a dynamic, as opposed to stable, article has led contemporary research to move from a focus on normative behaviour, socialisation and norm emergence to the explicit relationship between actors and norms (Hoffman, 2010).

3.3 Policy Norm Diffusion

Norm diffusion theory reveals the motivations of actors and their submission in conforming to norms. State institutions seemingly adopt norms in order to maintain power and individuals tend to yield to peer pressure due to shaming or diversion (Salimi et al, 2018). These types of insights allow constructivists to understand the

edifice of individuals, groups, organisations and governments in advancing the field of norm study. However, analysing policy norm diffusion (macro-level) is attributed to the actions of IOs and their epistemic communities from the constructivist perspective, arguing that the norm is adopted based on pressures from society and questions of legitimation (Braithwaite & Jeong, 2017; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Researchers assume these processes are a prerequisite for global unity in norm acceptance and internalisation, evidenced in supranational law and membership-based IOs (Braithwaite & Jeong, 2017). Braithwaite & Jeong (2017) and Finnemore & Sikkink (1998) detail the various components driving norm diffusion at the state and international levels, detailing coercive isomorphism, competition, informational networks and peer dynamics (Landolt, 2004). By emphasising the role of IOs as key agents, however, constructivists fail to grasp the context of North/South relations, their incentives and implementation at national and domestic levels (Landolt, 2004). Focusing on the interests of actors', the social constructivist lens to norm promotion emphasises the role of agency from entrepreneurs, IOs and national elites at the expense of material considerations (Landolt, 2004). In response to the meso- and macro-focused elements of social constructivism, other researchers articulate the need for agency-based approaches; these are in line with the modern study of norm diffusion that emphasise the role of actors in constructing norms (Fejerskov, 2016). Through understanding the influence actors' have in shaping and maintaining these organisations, analysing the bureaucracy in developing countries provides researchers with the awareness of how national level systems can adopt and implement new norms (Fejerskov, 2016).

3.4 Guidelines in Transitioning Towards a Circular Economy

With readily available support from thought leaders, such as EMF, in supporting the transition toward a CE, guidance and recommendations are extensively available. This charity, established in 2010 by Ellen MacArthur, provides innovations, research and toolkits in aiding businesses, governments and academic spheres in promoting the transition from a linear to a circular system. Posited on five interlinking areas in assisting this transition, EMF seeks to inspire current and future generations to re-think and re-design dominant structures to achieve SD. These five areas include; insight and analysis, business and governments, education, systemic initiatives and communication (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2014). Each of these dimensions is crucial in addressing the shift toward a CE, proposing routes for actors to apply these principles at the local, national and international levels. Through the application of resilience/systems thinking, EMF

encourages the learning of students, individuals, professionals and policy-makers alike to develop their mindsets and relevant skills in order to employ these actions via the communication to global audiences (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2014). By extensively conducting research on the inhibitors and enablers of CEs, case studies and conceptualisations, insight and analysis can inform and produce systemic initiatives (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2014). The area of business and government emphasises the creation of enabling environments and innovation in catalysing the transition and its eventual scale-up (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2014).

Similarly, the Stockholm Resilience Centre positions the CE as the most embracive and interdisciplinary approach established in countering environmental degradation and promoting SD (Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2016). The research originating from this Swedish institution identifies the linkage between innovation, knowledge sharing and alliances in overcoming apparent fractures between the environmental, economic and social spheres. Their reports detail recommendations for policy-makers in line with the importance of promoting learning, encouraging participation and fostering diverse and complex systems (Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2014). The interdisciplinary research produced by institutions and organisations, whose sole aim is advancing CE and SD activities, act as tangible components in practically advancing the development and promotion of this norm (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2014; Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2014).

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Norm Diffusion Theory

Norms are typically divided into two paradigmatic approaches; the cognitivist approach (constructivist and poststructuralists), which set standards of appropriateness as a regulative tool for actors' behaviours and rationalist approaches that emphasise the logic of consequences (Müller & Wunderlich, 2013; Wiener & Puetter, 2009). By both constraining the conduct of actors in addition with constituting their interests and identities, the cognitivist approach enables orientation within a complex field, accommodating the exploration of socially acceptable behaviour (Müller & Wunderlich, 2013; Broome, 2014, p.25). The constructivist research of norms primarily emphasises three distinguishing features; the intersubjectiveness of actor identity and the set standards of appropriateness, the patterns generated based on these behaviours and the prescriptive aspects of norms which set them apart from rules (Müller & Wunderlich, 2013). Whilst norm studies have transitioned from being analysed as fixed entities, it is argued that norms are dual by nature, exhibiting features of both stability and flexibility (Winston, 2017). Within norm diffusion literature, fused norms (stable) are argued to be spread precisely based on their original value or content; comparatively, an unfused norm (flexible) may change its content in the process of its lifecycle (Winston, 2017). This is important to note, as the classification informs how their relationship to actors are studied; this can create difficulties in studying the process of norm diffusion (Winston, 2017). Following the 'Norm Life Cycle' model as proposed by *Finnemore & Sikkink* (1998), the theory of norm diffusion can be easily conceptualised to assist in the study of this field (see Figure 4.1 for a detailed model).

	<i>Stage 1</i> <i>Norm emergence</i>	<i>Stage 2</i> <i>Norm cascade</i>	<i>Stage 3</i> <i>Internalization</i>
<i>Actors</i>	Norm entrepreneurs with organizational platforms	States, international organizations, networks	Law, professions, bureaucracy
<i>Motives</i>	Altruism, empathy, ideational, commitment	Legitimacy, reputation, esteem	Conformity
<i>Dominant mechanisms</i>	Persuasion	Socialization, institutionalization, demonstration	Habit, institutionalization

FIGURE 4.1 | THE STAGES OF A NORM'S LIFE CYCLE (FINNEMORE & SIKKINK, 1998)

As discussed in the Conceptual Framework (Section 2.2), the first stage of the 'Norm Life Cycle' begins with *norm emergence*; whereby, norms are assembled through the tripartite structure as proposed by *Winston* (2017). Typically, these are instituted by non-state actors such as individual or collective norm entrepreneurs who are motivated by empathy and altruism, using persuasion to incite collective social behaviour in adopting a morally weighted norm (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Müller & Wunderlich, 2013). These architects are crucial in relaying norms to social communities through effective framing methods in order to contest the existing standards of appropriateness (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Winston, 2017). This is a critical starting point for norm diffusion and these disruptive ideas have the potential in succeeding through correct management and invocative marketing (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). After reaching the threshold of persuading a critical mass, norms are handled by state actors, international organisations and various networks in order to *cascade* the norm (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). This is managed through institutionalisation or socialisation mechanisms and these influential actors are typically motivated by legitimation, isomorphism and esteem. States foster these norms in order to prove democratic or international legitimacy and avoid disapproval among its people so as to retain state power (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Socialisation drives the rapid adoption of new norms by using the tactics of coercion, praise and emulation among other states, networks and agents (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Finally, norms are *internalised* through legal ratifications or bureaucratic decision-makers and eventually become habituated through iterative or taken for granted behaviour; evidenced by the adoption of women's voting rights (Finnemore & Sikkink 1998).

4.2 Sustainable Entrepreneurship

Typically, entrepreneurship considers the individualistic opportunities of actors based on their personal attributes and motives in achieving economic growth and innovative market positions and is derived from the French meaning, 'taking the initiative to bridge' (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011; Müller & Wunderlich, 2013). However, stemming from the various streams of literature on sustainability-driven entrepreneurship, namely eco-, institutional- and social-entrepreneurship, the theory of sustainable entrepreneurship (SE) provides a new trajectory toward studying entrepreneurial action, in conjunction with environmental and societal values (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). This recent field of study offers a comprehensive conceptualisation of the aforementioned sustainability-led entrepreneurial theories, established to address their contributions in driving SD (Kardos, 2012). SE posits its rationale on solving unsustainable issues and reorganising market systems through the construction of social, environmental and economic value, ultimately led by market-oriented or institutional innovations (Schaltegger & Wagner 2011; Kardos, 2012). This is initiated and obtained through encouraging competitiveness, social responsibility, knowledge sharing, dynamism and innovation; achievable through stakeholder collaboration and efficient diffusion (Kardos, 2012).

Sustainable innovations are an integral aspect of SE, which is concerned with exerting value and influence to a mass market, and in turn society; these are often radical in nature and achieved through competitive advantage (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). SE challenges the conventional production methods, consumption patterns and market systems through the creation of superior products, services and models in the promotion of sustainable practises; a term economist Joseph Schumpeter referred to as 'creative destruction' (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). Whilst the theory of SE promotes quality of life, there are apparent difficulties regarding the integration of environmental performance into core economic processes, strategies and logic (Kardos, 2012). Empirical findings frequently recognise SMEs, positioned primarily in niche markets, to be the driving force in radical innovations and competitiveness, yet struggle to diffuse these without the proper networks and capabilities; comparatively, larger companies have the advantage of established networks and accessibility (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). Therefore, to tackle this problem, researchers suggest the vitality of collaboration between SMEs and mature corporations in successfully enabling SE; allowing larger companies to remain relevant in a complex system by activating their influences in spreading the innovations of SMEs in the broader market system (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). Predicated on similar characteristics, motives and actions, the norm entrepreneur can be envisaged in this context as the sustainable entrepreneur, playing an integral role in norm emergence and diffusion. The study

of SE is a relevant field due to its attempt in reconciling environmental issues with responsible social and economic actions and assists in explaining the role of private actors in driving the development of sustainability.

4.3 Circular Economies as Norm

Norm diffusion theory and SE were chosen as the key theoretical perspectives in understanding the international diffusion of CEs. Norm diffusion theory offers an insightful observation into how norms emerge, are adopted and eventually internalised, providing a unique and crucial perspective to the field of CEs. According to the 'Norm Life Cycle' model, the CE predominantly remains in the initial stages of norm emergence (merely a niche and disruptive idea), with many actors, organisations and institutions working to create a succinct meaning in engendering a transition toward circular activities (see Section 3.4). Based on the norm emergence tripartite structure proposed in norm scholarship (as mentioned in Section 2.3), the *problem* can be classified as the 'the continuation of unsustainable practises leading to environmental degradation and mass extinction', with the *value* and *action* respectively being 'preserving/conserving the planet for current and future generations' suggesting 'the CE as an operational approach to counter this problem' (Winston, 2017). The CE, whilst not a new notion, requires initiation from innovative entrepreneurs and private actors who can demonstrate this concept as a viable and necessary approach in achieving SD, consequently tackling Anthropogenic born issues. Researchers stress the need for the instigation of a universal conceptualisation of CEs in order to accrue collective knowledge and global participation; this study will, therefore, consider the CE to be a fused norm. This classification examines all facets of the tripartite structure interacting to establish the diffusion process, relying on intersubjectiveness to suggest behaviour and mutual goals (Wintston, 2017). Although this typology of norm diffusion is the most appropriate to CE dissemination, it is vital to understand that norms are not fixed entities, but rather dual articles and are therefore subject to change through actor interaction and individual interests. Many of these progressive leaders are confident the CE will become norm in society, detailing the imperativeness of stakeholder collaboration in diffusing this approach.

In analysing the role of norm entrepreneurs, the use of the SE theory will be used as a nested tool in investigating who the salient actors are in diffusing the CE as norm. According to previous studies and common social constructivist perspectives of norm diffusion (see Section 3.0), emphasis is usually placed on IOs and state actors as key facilitators. Embedding SE theory within the norm entrepreneur aspect of

CEs will help determine whether these private actors are in fact the key drivers of this norm diffusion. Whilst both fields of theory require extensive further research, these contributions seek to address the North/South divide, their respective opportunities and challenges, concurrently analysing the potential for development cooperation through CEs.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

In order to understand the logic, arrangements, and explicit/implicit rules associated with certain phenomena, qualitative research methods must fulfil three main criteria, namely; reliability, replicability and validity (Punch, 2005, p.134, 135 & 141; Bryman, 2015, p. 69). This thesis seeks to conduct an instrumental, single case study adopting an idiographic approach in order to understand both comprehensively and with a nuanced view, the field of CEs (De Vaus, 2001, p.221). The qualitative case study is the most applicable tool in examining the intertwined dynamics and discourse specific to the CE; the most supportive social research technique in answering the proposed research question.

5.2 Data Collection

As this research has been conducted as a desk study, the collected data consists exclusively of documentary data; this has provided both historical and contemporary insights into the academic field of CEs and allowed for corroboration between empirical cases, institutional reporting and educational platforms. Whilst much of the research collected came from conceptually driven scholarly journals, many of the sources were found outside the published bounds of academia out of necessity, in attempting to locate broader, politicised, socially considerate or logistical texts concerning the CE. These sources are here referred to as ‘grey literature’, comprised of sources from varying platforms such as institutions, press releases or websites. The principle sources of data, comprising of eight sources drawn from journal articles, grey literature and a book, act as the basis for theory, definitions and general analysis highlighting the prevailing discourse on CEs. The supportive data consists of only two sources, which were considered to be complementary to the principle sources as they were less assistive in the analysis and discussion.

5.2.1 Delimitations

In order to facilitate the collection of pertinent information in answering the set research question, this study established clear boundaries by stipulating delimitations. This was an important step in the data collection process, as the time constraints and resource availability of the desk study required perimeters within which to work, simultaneously, warranting the notion of accountability. In locating sources on CEs, some exclusion criteria were actioned, including; key phrases, targeted timeframes and language restrictions. Firstly, the target timeframes were set between 2000-2019 in order to locate the most current conceptualisations and understandings of the CE. However, the chosen sources were published between 2014-2018, representative of the rising popularity and research placed in this academic field. Secondly, the use of descriptors was important when searching for data, necessitating the explicit reference to 'circular', 'circularity', 'cyclical' or 'circular economies' within the text. This was employed so as to ensure the literature was recent, CE specific and allowed for a vast array of results pertaining to the various dimensions of CEs. Finally, the provision of only using articles written in English was actioned to ensure the semantics and terminologies were reflective of dominant discourse, especially from the global institutional arena. Whilst there are a plethora of sources on the field of CEs, the corpus of literature selected was considered to be representative of the dynamism of the field, providing insight into the various perspectives, focal points and conceptualisations of the CE.

5.3 Data Analysis

Following the principles of the Miles and Huberman framework, the collected documentary data was analysed through the use of coding and memoing, in order to allow ensure the most effective process of exploration and synthesis (see Figure 5.1 below). This framework uses three steps; data reduction, data display, drawing and verifying conclusions (Punch, 2005, p.197). Both data reduction and data display are used continuously throughout the analysis process, inducing an iterative cycle of collection, examination and necessary exclusion (Punch, 2005, p.198). In evaluating documentary data, it was essential to ensure these sources were authentic, credible and representative; this framework was chosen as the main process in evaluating data, as the field of CE is expansive, ambiguous and multidimensional (Punch, 2005, p.184).

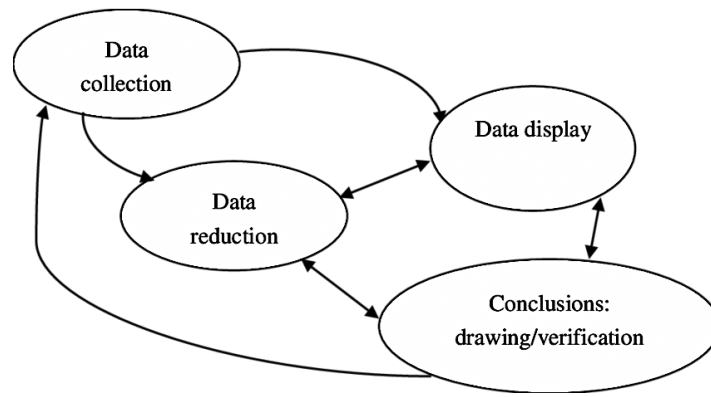


FIGURE 5.1 | *MILES & HUBERMAN FRAMEWORK* (PUNCH, 2005)

5.3.1 Coding

Using descriptive coding techniques to thematically classify and analyse the collected the documentary data, provided useful cataloguing for the purpose of displaying data (Punch, 2005, p.184). Coding allows for the analysis of data, used to determine commonalities between sources via labelling, tagging or naming methods (Punch, 2005, p.198). The descriptive coding technique for this thesis set six classifications in thematically separating the literature and applied when explicitly referenced within the sources; however, it must be noted that most sources overlapped in their classification. These classifications include; circular economies (CE), sustainable development (SD), norms (NR), sustainable entrepreneurship (SE), actors (AC) and the global south (GS) (see Appendix, Table 2). This form of coding assisted in clearly visualising the sources that pertain to certain themes and in turn identified the sources most useful for the discussion.

5.3.2 Memoing

There are four main types of memoing commonly employed in social research; substantive, theoretical, methodological or personal (Punch, 2005, p.202). Personal memoing was chosen as the key method, consisting of individualised notes for each source, specifically referencing the intended audience, the main viewpoint (for example Euro-centric) and the usefulness of the source for the thesis discussion (see Appendix, Table 2). As many sources were read and analysed, this was a useful tool in referring back to sources read in the early stages of data collection. Furthermore, it assisted in the data reduction stages by identifying the sources that were no longer of use or less relevant to the research at hand. This technique links with coding in finalising the third step of the Miles and Huberman framework, through developing propositions and a solid analysis (Punch, 2005, p.202).

5.4 Biases & Limitations

Documentary data is a contentious topic for some, with arguments pivoting around the issues of sampling, biases, intended audiences and the overreliance of such data (Punch, 2005, p.184; Yin, 2014, p.275 & 281). Conducted as a desk study, it could be argued that there is an overreliance of documentary data; however, this has been managed by incorporating document types sourced from varying platforms. This offers a broad dataset and provides various perspectives on the field; by locating the most accurate sources, the critical thinking skills of the researcher were enhanced (Yin, 2014, p.281). Although documents are written for an intended audience and therefore contain biases, the researcher becomes a vicarious observer to the communications these sources attempt to make, allowing for a critical interpretation of the authors' discussion (Yin, 2014, p.281). Whilst exclusion criteria were implemented to provide a guiding procedure for data collection, this can be argued to be at the expense of other valuable scholarly work causing sampling issues (Punch, 2005, p.184). However, due to timeframes, resource availability and the breadth of the field, this was a necessary step in weeding out irrelevant, misinformed or rhetorical sources and targeting the issue of overabundance of material available. Further limitations that must be acknowledged revolve around the biases of authors who seemingly write from a Euro- or Western-centric standpoint; this constrained some research and reiterated prevailing discourse biases, solidifying the inherent need for a study of this nature. The biases and limitations of this study, as outlined above, have posed some hurdles in collecting and analysing data, but have ultimately added to the skill of critical thinking and collection techniques.

6. Analysis

The following sub-sections of this analysis presents two of the codes used in systematically collecting and analysing the data; namely, Actors (AC) and the Global South (GS). As the codes of Circular Economy (CE) and Sustainable Development (SD) were used as descriptors in locating the most relevant sources pertaining to this field of study, these will not be considered as thematic points of analysis. Furthermore, the codes of Norms (NR) and Sustainable Entrepreneurship (SE) relate to the chosen theory for the study; therefore, these themes and sources will be intertwined as tools in strengthening the discussion (Section 6.3). By exploring these two core themes in-depth, an understanding of the drivers, barriers and opportunities within CEs will further ground this concept in spearheading the discussion on the diffusion of this norm.

6.1 Actors

There are a multitude of actors within the ecosystem of CEs, each playing distinct and essential roles in the process of diffusion, implementation and maintenance (see Figure 6.1). The chosen literature actively refers to the role of actors, revealing the apparent difficulties, drivers and opportunities for them in adopting a new economic system such as the CE. These actors are present within vertical levels (international, regional, national and local) and horizontally in the cooperation between industries, value chains and stakeholders. Most sources on the field of CE stress the need for stakeholder collaboration in accomplishing the implementation of this radical mechanism, further detailing the requirement of a conducive environment in doing so (Gower & Schröder, 2016; Prendeville & Sherry, 2014). In order to understand the framing, adoptive actions and strategies of these salient actors, it is first crucial to locate them within the ecosystem of CEs (Schröder et al, 2019, p.28).

On the international level, the actors involved in adopting and disseminating the CE include; international organisations (IOs), international institutions, political leaders and international corporations (Preston & Lehne, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2018 & Schröder et al, 2019). Current IOs, such as the Circular Economy Club (CEC), founded by CE experts, provides a public platform across 67 countries to

enhance networking and collaborative opportunities in the promotion of universalising the CE (Schröder et al, 2019, p.156). Consisting of scientists, specialists and industry group representatives, the role these actors play is crucial in facilitating innovation, leading discussions and formal coordinations, creating awareness and establishing urgency (Preston & Lehne, 2017; Anttonen et al, 2018). These types of responsibilities are driven through better regulations, compliance checks and evidence-based reporting on the enablers and inhibitors of CEs (World Economic Forum, 2018). By challenging the status quo and dominant systemic structures, alternate perspectives toward sustainability (in this case the CE) can create a supportive environment and contest the dominant lock-in narratives (Schröder et al, 2019, p.28). These actions are currently being fostered by international institutions such as the EU Commission, who have instigated the *Circular Economy Package: Closing the Loop* aimed at advancing CE practises within Europe through determined and tangible regulations and policies (European Commission, 2015; Gower & Schröder, 2016; Preston & Lehne, 2017; Korhonen et al, 2018b). By opposing the governing linear mind-sets, international actors can implement dominant discourse on the conceptualisation and principles of CEs in line with international agencies, such as EMF, demonstrating resilience thinking, building awareness and fostering co-developed strategies (Preston & Lehne, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2018). The adoption of such transitions in the international arena typically derive from national actors in their strive to universalise certain actions.

At the national level governments, businesses, NGOs, civil society and industry play vital roles in embracing CE activities (Preston & Lehne, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2018). Government is key in providing support to formalising group associations with the mutual goal of fostering circular thinking; similarly, the internalisation of these activities within government structures is an effective promotive tool and potential knowledge sharing platform (Preston & Lehne, 2017). The support of state government is evident in Holland; whereby, the state adopted a programme targeted at achieving CE by 2050 in explicit contention to the current linear economy - they are currently globally recognised leaders in the progression of CEs and SD (Schröder et al, 2019, p.5). Businesses are beginning to fathom the anticipated benefits of transitioning to a CE, as clearly outlined by agencies like EMF, enhancing their efforts in exploring resilience, value creation, research and development (R&D), job creation, customer loyalty and the reduction of negative externalities (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2015; Preston & Lehne, 2017). These sustainable innovations drive systemic change and mainstream the actions surrounding the concept of CEs, imparting positive connotations to the associated semantics, whilst adhering to the common goals of the SDGs (Anttonen et al, 2018; Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2015). Through the cooperation of stakeholders and supply chain partners, awareness can be built among other actors such as producers,

investors, professionals, consumers and state authorities (World Economic Forum, 2018; Anttonen et al, 2018). Furthermore, civil society can administer support to various actors in educating, advocating, facilitating and recommending innovative strategies and policies toward a CE transition (World Economic Forum, 2018). Another important actor at this level of CE transition lies within the realms of academia; empirical transition processes and shared knowledge can substantially inform researchers on the benefits, risks and understudied areas in the aims of broadening the scope of this field (World Economic Forum, 2018; Anttonen et al, 2018). In order for ideas and actions to reach this middle level, innovative ideas need to be first established, accepted and expanded; these are often instigated at the local level.

The actors at the local level, consisting primarily of local NGOs, SMEs, entrepreneurs and individuals, are considered integral in the initiation of CE activities (Preston & Lehne, 2017). Local government has the opportunity to provide incentives for local businesses via subsidies and tax breaks and can opportunise potential synergies between industries through, for example, waste regulation (World Economic Forum, 2018). Furthermore, by decoupling economic growth from natural resources, local authorities can manoeuvre local targets toward resource efficient methods and aim to adjust social norms in the process (World Economic Forum, 2018). Local NGOs are important in vertically linking the promotion of sustainable innovations with higher level organisations and act as key adherents in assisting SMEs, government pilot projects and activism (especially involving the informal sector) (World Economic Forum, 2018). One example of this is evident in Delhi, where two local NGOs (SriFsti and Chintan Environmental Research) have played crucial roles in training waste collectors and through the creation of an enabling environment, have encouraged partnerships with government in spreading awareness of informal waste pickers (IWP) (Schröder et al, 2019, p.61). SMEs, through lines of credit from investors and incentives from national governments, are the backbone to establishing alternative methods of production and consumption within industries, enabling new profit streams and piloting new initiatives (Schröder et al, 2019, p. 128 & 129; World Economic Forum, 2018). An example of investment is observable in Colombia, where over 17,000 SMEs' digital infrastructure was supported by the state; however, internet access to citizens remains low without further financial assistance, justifying the need for government support in supporting small business ventures (Schröder et al, 2019, p.126). Individually, citizens play a role by divesting in unsustainable bonds, learning about sustainable consumption habits and promoting these alternate business models among their respective networks (World Economic Forum, 2018). One pivotal actor in initiating the CE as an alternate approach to the presiding linear system is the entrepreneur; this role is vital in streamlining ideas, raising awareness and altering existing standards of appropriateness (Zamfir et al, 2017).

SEs are commonly driven by environmental, moral and ethical values in focusing benefits toward their respective communities, workforce, nature and future generations (Zamfir et al, 2017). They are instrumental in implementing sustainable innovations, with these ideas emanating from their socio-cultural, economic and personal contexts such as; work experience, age, gender, education and upbringing (Zamfir et al, 2017). In establishing SMEs, these entrepreneurs must consider factors, including firm size, value creation within businesses, innovations, industry and associated regulations; however, they remain critical actors in driving these ethically grounded ventures (Zamfir et al, 2017). Whilst there is not much concrete evidence on entrepreneurial focused CE case studies, *Schröder et al* (2019, p.53) detail the salience of these actors, along with civil society, activists, filmmakers and academics, who have been the primary pressure agents in advocating the global *Marine Plastics Pollution* campaign; yet, also requires international efforts through alliance building and agenda setting. SEs are integral actors in developing innovative solutions to environmental problems and can lead the paradigm shift toward sustainable living through embedding these values in communities and individuals (Korhonen et al, 2018b).

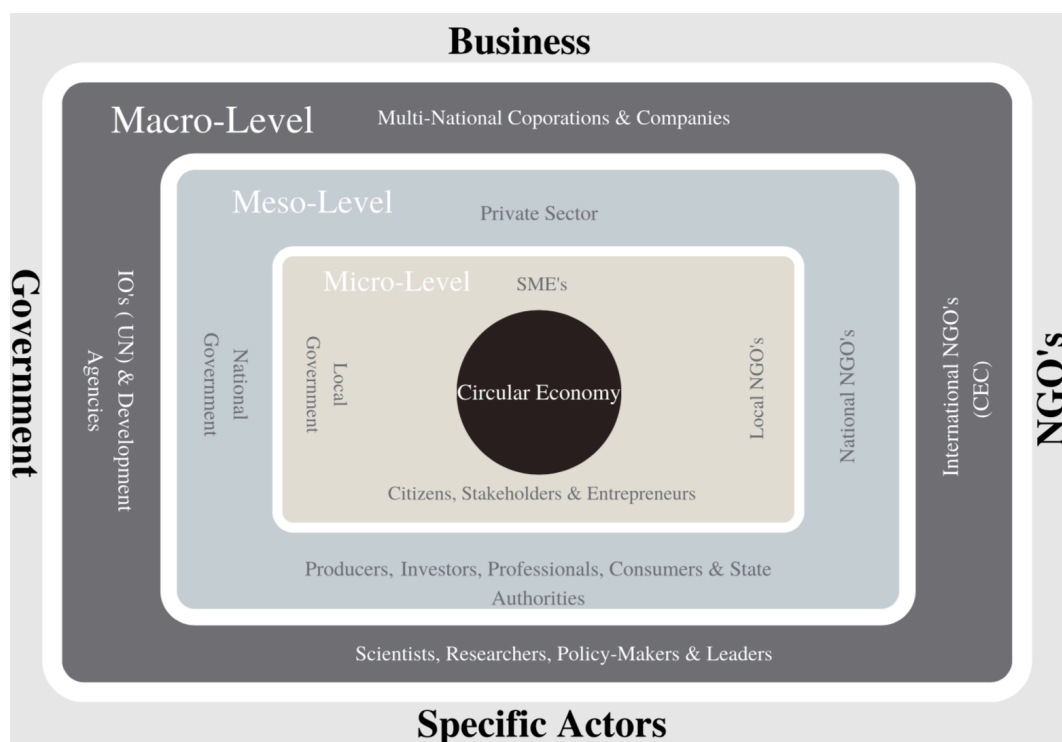


FIGURE 6.1 | *ACTORS WITHIN THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY ECOSYSTEM* (SELF-CONSTRUCTED: BASED ON SCHRÖDER ET AL, 2019, P.31)

6.2 The Global South

The Global South is consistently excluded within dominant discourse on CEs and development with most language, strategies and theorisations lending themselves to a Western-centric lens and, in turn, objectives (Gower & Schröder, 2016). Whilst the notion of CE is becoming increasingly prominent within the international development community, attentive scholars stress the need for cooperation among and across all actor levels. The narrative on the CE tends to favour the Global North, exemplifying circular business case studies and emphasising environmental, industrial and economic factors (Korhonen et al, 2018b). This is due to the perception that the CE is an agenda for advanced welfare states, rendering a lack of exploration into the participating actors in the Global South and the associated value chains (Preston & Lehne, 2017). Comparatively, the sources with regard for the Global South accentuate the social and environmental values involved in CE strategies, as well as considerations for economic dimensions (Schröder et al, 2019, p.168). The private sector of higher income countries are at present embracing principles of the CE, incentivised by governments and international institutions, whilst circular activities have been necessitated within the Global South as a means to survival (Gower & Schröder, 2016). In order to bridge this North-South divide, acknowledging the circular practises existent in underdeveloped countries is necessary; this leads to an understanding of the associated risks, opportunities and collaborative challenges they face.

There exist a horde of speculated barriers in the implementation of CEs within developing nations ranging from resource inefficiencies, path dependencies, increasing waste accumulation caused by overconsumption of industrialised countries, expertise deficiency, insufficient financial aid and a lack of technological advancements (Gower & Schröder, 2016; Preston & Lehne, 2017; Schröder et al, 2019, p.44). Some questions have also been raised about the loss of jobs when promoting the formal sector above the informal, as many people rely on activities, such as informal waste picking and recycling, to survive (Gower & Schröder, 2016). Within developing nations, SMEs face challenges surrounding the access to financing, technology in enhancing innovations and the architecture of their respective economies and societies (Zamfir et al, 2017). If the current linear model persists alongside population growth, climate change is predicted to intensify; CEs may assist in obviating these issues by alleviating resource related conflicts, tackling insanitary living conditions caused by pollution, fostering systemic support and increase human well-being (Gower & Schröder, 2016; Schröder et al, 2019, p.10).

The potential opportunities of CEs are termed by some scholars as a ‘triple-win’; increasing economic growth, reducing environmental impacts and improving employment and living conditions (Gower & Schröder, 2016). These advantages include the creation of employment opportunities, the decrease of environmental damage in lifting people out of poverty, the promotion of basic human rights and encouragement of international development cooperation. These can be achieved through the introduction of industrial symbiosis (inter- and cross-sectoral sharing of by-products), shared-knowledge platforms, technological advancements, stable measurement metrics to inform targets, SME support networks and local NGOs in aiding both sustainable innovations and civil society (World Economic Forum, 2018; Gower & Schröder, 2016; Preston & Lehne, 2017). Showcasing civil society groups in support of circular activities, the local organisation *VAAGDHARA* provides endogenous rural communities in India with knowledge on rights, nutrition, education and living improvements through sustainable methods, working with knowledge-sharing platforms, institution-building and continuous support networks in achieving these goals (Schröder et al, 2019, p.175). Moreover, the potential for leapfrogging in becoming industrialised is a real possibility and more intuitive option for developing nations who already understand the architecture of the affiliated behaviour, logistics and potential of circular activities (Gower & Schröder, 2016; Preston & Lehne, 2017).

A prime and frequently cited case is located in China, frontrunners in this sector, whereby industrial symbiosis is required within three-quarters of industrial parks, ratified in national policy as of 2009 (Schröder et al, 2019, p.135; Preston & Lehne, 2017; Korhonen et al, 2018b). Other examples include the European Commission funding the SWITCH-Asia Programme, ACIDLOOP, in promoting resource efficiency and CE in Indian metal-finishing SMEs and the Kenyan government’s creation of the legalised *E-Waste Management & Coordination Regulations of 2013*, to ensure safe handling, disposal, recycling and collection of electronic waste (Gower & Schröder, 2016; Schröder et al, 2019, p.162). Other global circular activities are visually represented in a map and table to portray the patterns of CE practises, discussions and goals (see Figure 6.2 & see Appendix, Table 3). Transcending beyond initial scepticism, the Global South especially promotes the social and environmental dimensions in agenda-setting and norm dispersion, emphasising the potential for them in leading a CE revolution (Schröder et al, 2019, p.11 & 168). By ensuring collaboration amongst all actors involved in the ecosystem of CEs coupled with the realisation of inhibitors and enablers in such a transition, international development silos can be transversed and sustainability achieved.



FIGURE 6.2 | *MAPPING CIRCULAR ECONOMY ACTIVITY AROUND THE GLOBE* (PRESTON & LEHNE, 2017; WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2018)

6.3 Discussion

Based on the constructivist perspectives of norm diffusion theory, considering the CE as a norm produces an understanding of the seemingly absent research on the social dimensions that underpin this concept. Highlighted within prevailing discourse, this missing facet is crucial in comprehending the mechanics of CEs in order to effectively educate citizens, diffuse this notion and ultimately, be embrasive of such a radical sustainable innovation. The constructivist viewpoint of norm diffusion theory allows for an analytical observation of the behaviours, motives and mechanisms that actors associate with and employ. In order for this norm to reach levels of dissemination and internalisation, it must first be framed in a concise manner in order to resonate with the intended audience. Considering the CE norm to be constructed as stated earlier (see Section 4.3), this framing clearly states an issue, attaches morals to the value and pragmatically suggests a solution in countering the problem. This framing can be further conventionalised by establishing an all-inclusive and interdisciplinary conceptualisation of the CE; the chosen definition applied to the context of this study was provided by *Kircherr et al* (2017), detailed in the Conceptual Framework (Section 2.2.2).

Within both the Global North and South, the constitution of this norm is achieved through the norm entrepreneur who plays an integral role in positioning and

permeating this throughout society. Influenced by the norms entrepreneurs' moral beliefs and values in inciting actionable sustainable behaviours, this role within the context of CEs can be attributed to the sustainable entrepreneur. Founded on characteristics such as altruism, empathy and resilience, identifying the connection between the norm entrepreneur and sustainable entrepreneur provides a clarification in how these actors pragmatically drive this diffusion. Parallels are here drawn between the patterns of individual and collective entrepreneurs initiating sustainable solutions in response to current problems through the establishment of innovative techniques and effective framing in challenging the existing standards of appropriateness. The persuasion of this norm is driven through ideational commitment, helping to emphasise social and environmental values. The architecture of this norm provides persuasive language in which the SE can prompt discussions about values, priorities and strategies in solving these unsustainable issues. This market-oriented radical innovation, after reaching a critical mass, can be institutionalised at the national level, managed by national actors through the mechanisms of socialisation. This is effectuated through emulation processes, commandment and coercive strategies in order to retain reputation and relevancy. Once this norm is successfully institutionalised in the national system, the micro-level may drive the internalisation through legislative processes to become a universally habitualised norm across all societies.

Whilst the collaboration between actors at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels are crucial in institutionalising the CE, the SE is here argued to be the salient actor in instigating and driving these systems to become omnipresent, rooted in local communities' ambitions. This is key in both the Global North and South to build awareness, urgency and passion for a radical systemic shift amongst citizens, stakeholders and local authorities. Starting at the base of this 'pyramid' local communities can lead the road toward fulfilling the SDGs, promote civil activism in challenging the status quo and promote responsible consumption. By creating this type of awareness and establishing moral pressure in achieving a threshold of norm diffusion to the meso and macro levels, SEs have the potential to challenge isomorphism, linear mindsets, shift consumer habits, promote better production, design and the associated regulations attached to the use and disposal of these. These effects positively spillover to the Global South if instituted by the Global North through the reduction of illegal waste dumping, in turn reducing pollution, disease, sickness and poverty. SEs within developing nations have prospectives in the creation of job opportunities within the formal sector, reducing resource-related conflicts, tackling pollution, subsistence living, disease related challenges becoming pioneers in the dissemination and application of this norm. Based on the research conducted by EMF, the five interlinking areas of CEs are an effective set of guidelines, which can be loosely followed by SEs and, by extension, SMEs in

increasing collaboration, education, metrics and initiatives (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2015).

Currently, CEs are following a trajectory toward becoming norm, but still have many barriers to overcome in becoming largely accepted as the dominant economic system. This reiterates the importance of implementing circular innovations at the local level, altering common behaviours and actions from the bottom-up. It is empirically evident that the instigation of membership aligned action plans, the implementation of industry regulations within regions and the establishment of agencies committed to informing society of CEs, is a positive step in the promotion of this norm. These reassuring actions fulfil many of the SDGs from a global perspective, achieve environmental stewardship, promote better North/South relations and mitigate against further degradation. Moreover, the consideration of the human dimension in conjunction with this system decouples economic growth from natural resources, placing value instead on the interaction between society and the biological sphere - on which humans are irrefutably dependent. This builds intersubjectiveness between individuals who can collectively reorganise the current reigning systems through innovation and by re-setting the standards of appropriateness to align with the broader goals of SD.

Whilst there are many opportunities associated with the implementation of such a system through the norm diffusion process, it would be remissive and naive to understand this as the end-goal in achieving universal SD. Consequently, it must be made clear that despite the expected emergence, dissemination and internalisation of this norm, the CE system is merely one such mechanism in approaching and encouraging sustainable methods, consumption, design, disposal and social behaviour. This system cannot exclusively mitigate against environmental damage, but is a discerning development in attempting to reverse human-induced degradation and in altering mindsets. Nevertheless, the diffusion of this norm is a critical point of departure in educating societies, declaring urgency and manifesting collective actions towards becoming a sustainable species. The theoretical framework chosen to investigate this field has offered relevant and insightful perspectives into the suspected barriers, opportunities and proactive actions required in attaining a widespread paradigmatic shift toward a circular system – a useful realisation in promoting further studies and filling gaps in research.

6.3.1 Summary of Findings

Finally, this analysis and discussion was guided by the research question seeks to explore who the key actors are in driving the global dissemination of CEs as a norm. In answer to this, it is argued that the salient actors in driving the diffusion of

this norms are recognised as SEs, understood within this context as the norm entrepreneur, throughout both developed and developing nations. Whilst all actors within the ecosystem of the CE play an integral role in the diffusion, internalisation and logistics of implementation, the SE is crucial in locally encouraging the necessary paradigm shift away from the linear economic system. This diffusion is actioned through persuasive promotion and emphasising of the societal and environmental values underpinning this concept. Through these actions the SE aims to appeal to individuals, aiming to reach a tipping point in furthering the dissipation of the norm to national and international levels. These actions are especially important within industrialised nations, the main over-consumers and waste producers, who can produce positive ripple effects for developing nations. The Global South are actively pursuing circular practises, however, the potential lies in the greater goals of raising human well-being, reducing environmental degradation, increasing economic welfare, leapfrogging and dovetailing key spheres. Overall, the SE at the local level plays a pivotal role in diffusing the norm of CEs through tangible and demonstrative actions to achieve the overarching goals of SD.

7. Concluding Remarks

7.1 Future Research

According to researchers, there is much future research required with regard to the field of CEs, especially in addressing developing nations, the social dimension, indicators and a concurrent conceptualisation – these recommendations are evidenced within the data analysis table (see Appendix, Table 2). The field of CEs could benefit from research in connection with general norm diffusion theory, not specific to the cognitivist perspective. This would build a constellation of norm research pertaining to the CE, opening a dialogue about diffusion and broadening the scope to understand the actors, their motivations and practises. This is important in fulfilling the overlooked social dimension within CEs and would aid micro-, meso- and macro- level actors in pragmatically disseminating this norm in reality. In line with this, more research needs to be conducted on the role of private actors and their position, as most sources refer to IOs, the state or law in this transition. For a universal paradigmatic shift to occur based on the principles of the CE, the academic field should broaden its evidence-base to incorporate studies within developing nations, moving beyond the common Western-centric view. This would inform other researchers of the Global South's potential, current actions and barriers in contributing to development cooperation and SD. Furthermore, this consideration would likely benefit researchers in their personal research methods and datasets, prompting important questions and studies outside of theory and scholarly publishings.

7.2 Conclusion

Examining the overarching concept of SD in acting as a guiding movement toward engendering a sustainable society, it is evident that alterations need to be made in the economic, social and environmental spheres. With no obvious path in achieving this, the radical innovation of CEs was presented as a potential mechanism in steering these goals. Although this is becoming increasingly popularised and discussed, this alternate system still remains largely unknown; motivated by this, the study sought to understand the global dispersion of CEs. Employing the

constructivist approach to norm diffusion the constitutive, constraining and underpinning actions of actors were explored, detailing their motives, mechanisms and identities. Based on the 'Norm Life Cycle' model the process of norm diffusion a clear comprehension of norm emergence, cascading and internalisation was understood, with a particular emphasis placed on the norm entrepreneur. Furthermore, by embedding the SE theory within norm diffusion theory, patterns were drawn between the norm entrepreneurs and SE in shaping these actors as integral in the diffusion process.

Through a descriptive, instrumental case study, this research engaged with the Miles and Huberman framework in thematically coding, personally memoing and analysing the collected documentary data. An analysis of these results presented the actors involved within the mechanics of the CE and located the Global South as an integral player in the globalised system, exemplified with real world actions. Examining these codes allowed for a robust discussion in answering the research question, finding the SE to be the salient actor in driving the diffusion of the CE norm. Finally, a direction for future research was presented, detailing the need for further research into entrepreneurial case studies, the broadening of discussions of CE norm diffusion study and the studies with consideration for the Global South. This thesis has aimed to fill this gap in research by identifying the proceeding steps for actors in disseminating the norm of CEs, ultimately driving the SD agenda in achieving true universal sustainability.

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Appendix 1

Concept	Description	Association with circular economy
Sustainable development	Sustainable development is a comprehensive concept that attempts to reconcile and combine three dimensions of development: economic, environmental and social.	Sustainable development connects with the circular economy through the economic and environmental dimensions, as well as through corporate social responsibility, business's entryway into sustainable development.
Green economy	The green economy is a concept that proposes economic solutions to mostly environmental issues through large, multipartite policy proposals emanating from the United Nations and trickling down through national governments and NGOs.	The green economy overlaps with the circular economy in that both concepts leverage economic activities in order to attain sustainability.
Performance economy	The performance economy (also known as the functional economy) is one of the main DNA strands (along with cradle-to-cradle and industrial ecology) of the circular economy. Its thesis dictates that in order for business to decouple growth from resources consumption, new business models based on selling service (or performance) rather than goods in quantity, and with retained ownership, must be adopted. This general idea can spur innovation and create incentives to close production and consumption loops.	The performance economy is one of the main pillars of the circular economy, demonstrated through the focus on longevity and intelligent waste-as-input management, powered by innovation and new business models.
Life cycle thinking	Life cycle thinking (LCT) is closely tied with life cycle assessment (LCA) and life cycle management (LCM). Its main goal is to reduce environmental impacts through an ISO landmarked, eco-efficiency-based methodology, which looks at each step of the product, process or service's life cycle, in order to design or redesign these for lower systemic impact.	Life cycle thinking (including LCA and LCM) is based on systems thinking mostly applicable at the value chain concept level. It is steeped in relative sustainability assessment (i.e. impact assessment based on hotspot identification), while circular economy is based on absolute sustainability assessment (ASA). ³
Cradle-to-cradle thinking	Cradle-to-cradle thinking champions eco-effectiveness (and dismisses eco-efficiency) ⁴ through an approach based on cycling technical nutrients (such as durable goods made of plastics or metals) and biological nutrients (such as consumption products like food) in order to achieve healthy material metabolisms (such as industrial symbiosis programmes).	Cradle-to-Cradle thinking was developed by William McDonough and Michael Braungart and is a design framework that includes the Circular Economy. It entails a circular paradigm to achieve total recycling through product design (or redesign). The products are designed for recycling with safe and healthy materials in "use cycles" to enable and optimize the Circular Economy. In the early 1990s McDonough and Braungart introduced their approach to the concept of biological and technical "products as a service".
Shared value	Shared value is a management approach that was developed by strategy authorities Michael Porter and Mark Kramer in order to reconcile capitalism with societal needs. The framework calls for businesses to create value by identifying and addressing social needs through new products and markets, redefined value chains and the creation of community development clusters.	Shared value endeavours to map out the intersection between evaluative approaches and business strategy for profit making. Both shared value theory and circular economy concepts rest on the idea that the economy needs to be overhauled and decoupling mechanisms need to be introduced for business and consumers to continue to thrive; however, circular economy theory calls for greater disruption.
Industrial ecology	Industrial ecology is a research and application field focused on the creation and maintenance of a closed-loop industrial ecosystem. Industrial ecology aims at optimizing energy and materials, pollution and waste reduction through an economically viable transformation of industrial byproducts or waste into inputs, with the ultimate goal of enabling industrial systems that mimic natural ecosystems.	The application scope of industrial ecology is based on the association of multiple companies within an industrial ecosystem. It coincides with circular economy thinking on taking a systems approach to resource efficiency in terms of circularity.
Extended producer responsibility	Extended producer responsibility (EPR) is a condition of the "polluter pays" principle and aims at shifting a product's environmental responsibility over the full life cycle back towards the producer (and away from municipalities). Even though EPR has the potential to drive change over the full life cycle, it has mostly enabled post-consumer end-of-life management.	Extended product responsibility is a strictly defined business concept whose applicability is focused within a single company. It consists of the first attempt at a systematic closed-loop system with a private actor focus, primarily based on systems thinking to "design out waste" by an individual producer.
Ecodesign	The concept of ecodesign is based on integrating environmental aspects into product development. Ecodesign can be used as a tool to implement LCA results or it can be a guideline, a checklist or an analytical tool that supports an eco-efficiency-based product development process.	Ecodesign is a tool that aims to implement environmental considerations into product design and is often used in conjunction with LCA.

TABLE 1 | CONCEPTS CE DRAWS FROM (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2018)

Author/s	Year	Source Type	Doc. Type	Premise	Code	Memo	Future Research
Schröder et al	2019	Principle	Book	Presents a social science perspective on CE discourse through the illumination of case studies, policy recommendations and North/South relations.	CE SD NR AC	This book is excellent in describing multiple facets related to the CE, with a specific focus on the Global South. Political instruments, current conceptualisations & actions, opportunities and barriers. Though, it does not seem to be theoretically grounded nor consider norm diffusion theory or sustainable entrepreneurship specifically (there is mention). Very useful for analysis of thesis. (Considers Global South & students/scholarly audience)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many suggestions pertaining to the particular aspect under review (see book) • Specifically, the authors suggest further research into the missing human & social dimensions of CE
Preston & Lehne	2017	Principle	Briefing Report	This report considers the CE in relation to the Global South, considering potential barriers & opportunities if this were to be adopted.	CE SD GS AC	Excellent report locating the Global South as playing an integral role in the international system. Though it could be considered somewhat speculative, it attempts to make this statements based on findings & past experiences. (Global South focus & scholarly audience/organisational followers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools to track resource flows, stocks and trade within the economy • CE approaches as being co-developed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little consideration of risks & trade-offs
Gower & Schroeder	2016	Principle	Policy Report	Details the opportunities in accelerating the SDGs via case studies in the Global South.	CE SD GS AC	This report has great consideration of the Global South in countering the absence of development in prevailing discourse. It focuses on real world cases as proof to claims & provides convincing evidence in support of transitioning to a CE (Global South focus & policy-makers/practitioners)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of obstacles in more depth in order to build comprehensive typology of CE practises in the Global South
World Economic Forum	2018	Principle	Report	The transition process in becoming a CE city; detailing opportunities, barriers, & the role of various actors in achieving this.	CE SD AC	Very good report in informing about the transition to becoming a circular city. However, only considers developed countries in this process. (Western-centric & scholarly audience/economists)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of CE in urban planning • Need for platforms to facilitate information exchange • Lack of metrics to measure circularity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned obsolesce means need for better design and waste separation in line with this • Create awareness and sense of

						urgency
						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to shift linear mindset
Korhonen et al	2018 (b)	Principle	Journal Article	CE as emerging approach not theory, an essentially contested concept (ECC) & as a paradigmatic shift.	CE NR SE	<p>Discussion of CE from societal viewpoint. Linked to norms & constructivism by considering actors involved at all levels of the system. Details the need for research to turn to aspects like culture, structures, radical innovations & paradigms. (EU-centric & scholarly audience)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More scientific discussion on CE • Paradigmatic potential of CEs • Values, societal structure & cultures surrounding CE still unexplored • More scientific discussion on CE required • Care when framing concept of CEs
Zamfir et al	2017	Principle	Journal Article	Aims to uncover the key drivers of SE in the case of European SMEs through country analysis.	CE AC SE	<p>Very good article in locating the use of SE in analysing case studies of SMEs adopting CE activities. Only source within this mix actively referencing SE and provides some good insight into this theory and associated drivers, though from EU perspective. (Euro-centric & scholarly audience)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-level approach required (not just meso-level) to understand hinderances to the emergence of CE
Anttonen et al	2018	Principle	Journal Article	This article considers the CE from three primary dimensions; namely, institutional, university and government (triple helix) in analysing the cross-over and distinctive components of CEs in relation to these.	CE SD AC	<p>Analysing the cross-over and individual effects related to CE and each of these sections adds insight into the emphasis placed within each. This can help inform the thesis in what actors prioritise within their consideration of CE activities. (Western-centric & scholarly audience)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss and share activity in diminishing negative effects of CE transition • Empirical case studies to analyse communication and the development processes of CEs <p>Inclusion of sustainable consumption within these spheres</p>
EMF	2015	Principle	Executive Summary	This is an executive summary of EMF research up to 2015, which details the rationale for businesses to transition to the CE	CE SD AC	<p>Important understandings of logistics of CE and recommendations for businesses in moving forward. Details drivers, challenges & reiterates the 5 interlinking areas toward a CE. Good report from the perspective of GN companies, offering some realistic and tangible goals. (Western-centric & scholarly audience)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No future recommendations as such, but speculating some benefits, implicitly implies the need for further research in certain areas (eg.

					audience/economists)	opportunities for consumers, businesses & nations)	
Predeville & Sherry	2014	Supportive	Technical Report	CE logistics, associated challenges & its relation to ecodesign.	CE SD	<p>Interesting article, which provides some good insight into various conceptualisations & processes of CE. Explains well the notion of eco design & its relationship to CEs - an important part of this process. Whilst an important aspect of CEs is the design aspect, this article, other than conceptualisations, may not be of much use compared to other selected literature.</p> <p>(Western-centric & designers)</p>	- Difficult to analyse resource inputs in the economy
European Commission	2015	Supportive	Press Release	This Press Release details the introduction of the CE package as established & implemented by the EU Commission, seeking to 'close the loop' through effective recycling, detailing the benefits for all.	CE SD	<p>Details the current issues & expected actions toward reducing food waste, ensuring ecodesign, revising legislative plans & altering production, consumption & waste habits. Useful in understanding current actions of EU & practical steps in mitigation, but not in relation to the RQ. (EU-centric & general public/politicians/industry)</p>	- No future research suggestions

TABLE 2 | DATA ANALYSIS TABLE (SELF-CONSTRUCTED, 2019)

	Shelter	Mobility	Food	Waste
<i>Extending the use cycle</i>	El Salvador – a housing NGO partnered with the government to use more durable earthquake-resistant building technologies in social housing. ⁱ	India's Tata Steel set up an Advanced Materials Research Centre along with the Indian Institute of Technology to develop lightweight, high-strength materials for automotives. ⁱⁱ	Vietnam's government is working with the World Bank on a supply chain for frozen food, to reduce losses and improve food quality. ⁱⁱⁱ	In Nigeria, about 70 per cent of all imported e-waste is functional – it is now sold to consumers after testing. ^{iv}
<i>Enabling additional use cycles</i>	Modular construction is being used for low-cost housing solutions in New Delhi, enabling more efficient disassembly at product end of life. ^v	In Brazil, a number of companies are active in the market to replace car parts through the National Association of Auto Parts Remanufacturers. ^{vi}	In Nigeria, tractor sharing among smallholder farmers is being used to improve agricultural productivity. ^{vii}	In India, a new e-waste Extended Producer Responsibility system requires companies to set targets for collection and repairs. ^{viii}
<i>Minimizing impact</i>	In Vietnam, building materials from rice husks are used in Ho Chi Minh City to build more fire-resistant, heat-insulated and sound-insulated buildings. ^{ix}	Fiat cars exported to Brazil contain polyurethane seat foams with 5 per cent soy polyol. ^x	An entrepreneur in Indonesia is experimenting with bioplastic food packaging to reduce plastic waste in Jakarta. ^{xi}	In India, EnviGreen has created a 100 per cent organic, biodegradable and eco-friendly plastic bag. ^{xii}
<i>Changing utilization patterns</i>	In India, new digital platforms such as Airbnb and OYO are allowing users to share rooms and homes. ^{xiii}	7 million km of driving may have been cut by the introduction of UberPOOL in Bangalore and Delhi. ^{xiv}	In Tanzania, the government is working with the World Bank to develop more water-efficient practices among smallholder farmers. ^{xv}	In India, the government has passed new e-waste handling rules to divert waste away from local scrap merchants. ^{xvi}
<i>Looping an asset through additional use cycles</i>	In Haiti, debris from natural disasters has been converted into concrete building blocks to build affordable homes in Port-au-Prince. ^{xvii}	In India, trials are under way to evaluate the potential to bury shredded plastic in roads, both reducing amounts of waste sent to landfills and increasing the durability of roads. ^{xviii}	In Brazil, Procomposto, an SME start-up, provides waste collection and composting services to generators of organic waste in cities. ^{xix}	In Tanzania, BORDA, ISWA and the Dutch government have given technical and financial support to municipal governments to improve municipal waste-management processes. ^{xx}

TABLE 3 | *EXAMPLES OF CIRCULAR ACTIVITIES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH* (PRESTON & LEHNE, 2017)