

# Emerging Key Issues in Accelerating the Circular Economy in the Republic of Korea

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11<sup>th</sup> Regional 3R and Circular Economy Forum in Asia and the Pacific



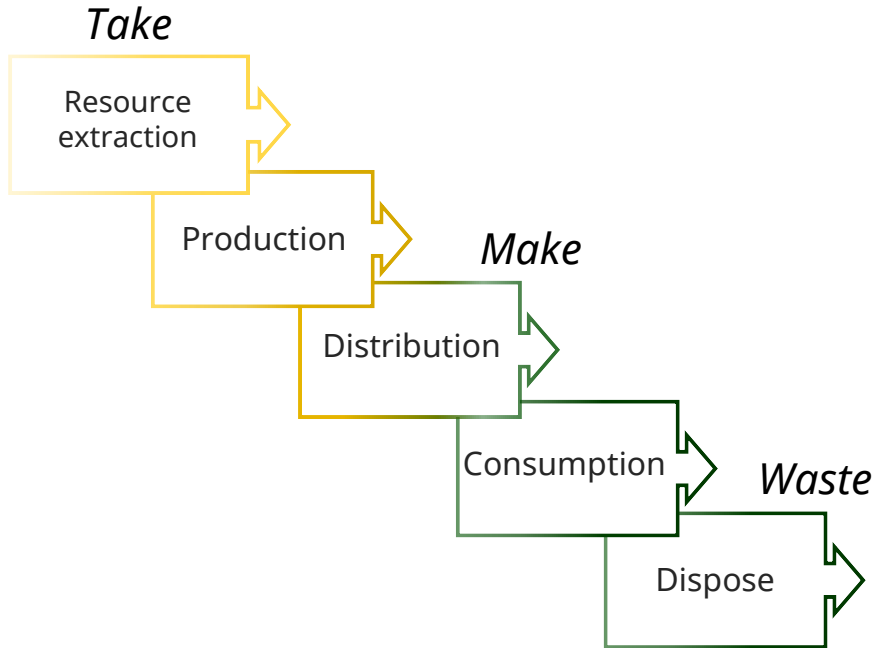
DEPARTMENT OF  
**ECONOMIC AND  
SOCIAL AFFAIRS**



Ministry of Environment  
Republic of Korea



# Economic Paradigm Shift : Linear Economy → Circular Economy

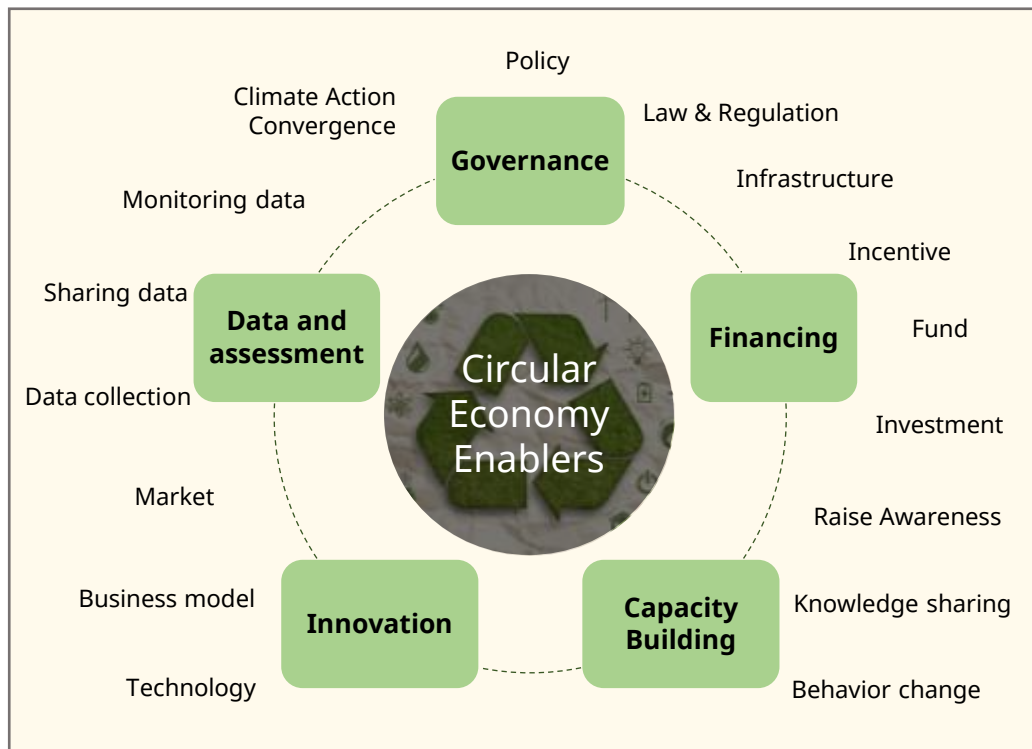


Linear: “Take-Make-Waste” model



Circular: “Make-Use-Recycle” model

# Circular “Economy” = “Economy” Paradigm?



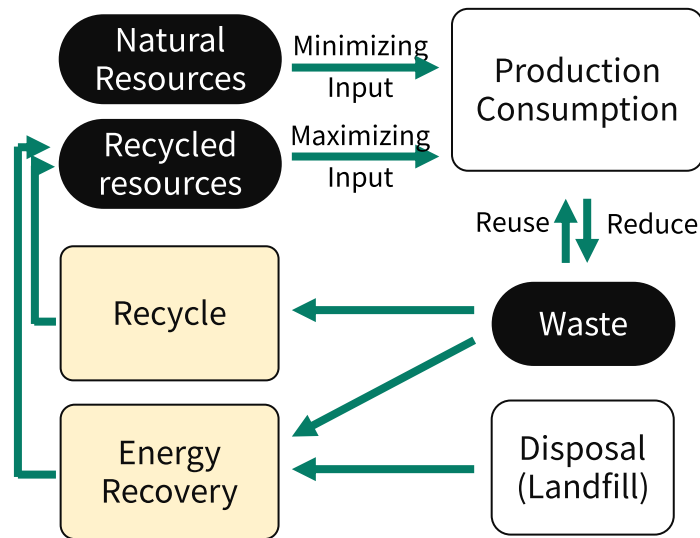
The broad definition of “Circular Economy” entails **not only economic shift, but societal transition.**

- ▶ Implies an **integrative framework**  
Embedding **socio-economic transformation**
- ▶ Emphasizes the need for **engaging all relevant stakeholders**

# Circular Economy Framework in Korea

Jan 2018	As a legal foundation for resource circulation society, <b>“Framework Act on Resources Circulation”</b> enacted
Sep 2018	National Mid- & Long-term Policy Road Map(‘18~’27), <b>“1st Master Plan for Resources Circulation”</b> established
Dec 2020	<b>“Plan for Net-zero Carbon by 2050”</b> Announced - One of 10 main tasks for the circular economy
Dec 2021	For reducing waste and enhancing circulation, <b>“K-Circular Economy Action Plan”</b> established
Oct 2022	For reducing plastic pollution, <b>“Plan for lifecycle zero-plastic”</b> established
Dec 2022	Revision of <b>“Framework Act on Resources Circulation”</b> -Integration of life-cycle approach into overall framework

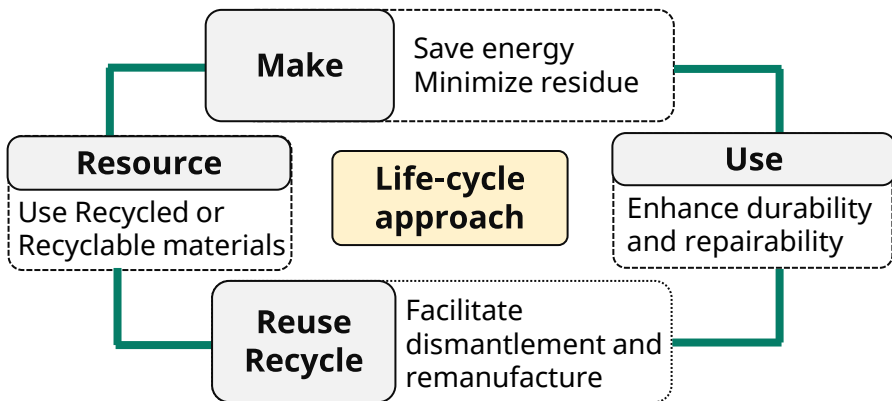
## Resources Circulation System



# Emerging Key Issue (1):

## Expanding life-cycle integrated policy for product eco-design

### Sustainable Product Design



### Enhance and Expand “Cyclic Availability Evaluation”

(Old) Evaluate the ease of recycling the products  
 (New) Evaluate the product eco-design integrating life-cycle

- 1 Select some of the product lines considering the amount of distribution and consumption
- 2 Establish eco-design manuals product-by-product, provide consultations for small businesses

Production	Distribution	Use
<p>PET bottles made of recycled materials</p>	<p>Paper-only packaging</p>	<p>label-free PET bottles</p>

# Emerging Key Issue (2): Introducing the regulatory sandbox for circular economy

**Objective** Support companies in the environmental field through prompt regulatory confirmation; ; temporary permission; and regulatory exemptions from verification

## Pillar 1

**For which:** Emerging businesses

- **(Tech)** First developed or innovatively developed from the current technology  
ex) ① *Thermosetting plastic → gasification*, ② *Food waste → hydrogenation*
- **(Service)** Improving the effectiveness and competence of the current services or creating new markets  
ex) ① *Platform for delivery using reusable containers*, ② *Transforming municipal waste into resources*

## Pillar 2

**How:** Regulatory special cases

- (1) Prompt confirmation:** Expedite the administrative process from submission to approval within 30 days
- (2) Temporary permission:** In case it's impossible to proceed with a quick market launch by the current regulations
- (3) Regulatory exemption from verification:** In case it's impossible to proceed with tests/verifications by the current regulations

## Pillar 3

**Towards:** "Life-cycle" integration

- (1) **Integrate "life-cycle" concept into policies** to accelerate transformation into circular economy
- (2) **Upscale the management of factories** from production to disposal
- (3) **Improve the assessment for circulation** at every step of the waste life-cycle from production to disposal
- (4) Come up with **more national policies for circular economy** considering life-cycle



# Emerging Key Issue (3):

## Launching disposable cup deposit-refund scheme

### “ K-Circular Economy Action Plan” (12/2021)

- Goal for the usage rate of recycled packaging materials: ('21) 81% → ('30) 85% → ('50) 90%
- Plan
  - (1) **Reduce:** Enhance the responsibility for overpacking, **Upscale the use of reusable packaging materials**
  - (2) **Recycle:** Unify the type of packaging materials, Induce transformation from using plastic to other materials

### Disposable Cup Deposit System

Policy initiated in June 2020  
Implemented from Dec 2022

- **(Concept)** Mandate a **surcharge of 300 won (21 US cents) per drink** a consumer buys in a takeaway cup, **refundable upon the return of the package for recycling.**
- **(Progress)** The scheme went into effect last December in **the two regions of Sejong**, the central administrative city, and **Jeju**, the southern tourist island with large franchise brands.
- **(Issue)** Bring up the return rate, ease the workload of owners of cafes and fast-food outlets



# Conclusion

## Paradigm Shift in Korea

**Linear Economy**  
"Take-Make-Waste"



**Circular Economy**  
"Make-Use-Recycle"



## Emerging Key Issues in Korea

### Product eco-design

- Life-cycle integrated product design
- Expand "Cyclic Availability Evaluation"

### Regulatory Sandbox

- Support emerging businesses
- Facilitate and ease the admin process

### Deposit-refund scheme

- Charge refundable fee on takeaway cup
- Pilot projects in Sejong and Jeju

## UNOSD & MoE of Korea



Ministry of Environment  
Republic of Korea

- **UNOSD and MoE of Korea have closely collaborated under partnership** in the environmental field.
- **UNOSD plays a bridging role** between Korea and Member States to convey the best practices in environmental domain of Korea.





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