

Journal of
**Sustainable Energy and
Environmental Development**

econsciences.com

Volume 1

September 2025

Issue 1

*The Circular Economy and the Global South: Sustainable
Industrial Development*

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Springer 2023

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Abstract. This book review critically examines "The Circular Economy and the Global South: Sustainable Industrial Development" edited by Patrick Schröder, Kartika Anggraeni, Uwe Weber, and Ali Ahmad. The volume brings together leading scholars and practitioners to explore how the Global South can adopt and adapt circular economy (CE) models to achieve sustainable industrialization and development. Emphasizing regional diversity, the book delves into case studies from Africa, Latin America, and Asia, revealing the opportunities and challenges faced by countries with differing levels of infrastructure and governance capacity. It discusses how CE can contribute to inclusive growth, innovation, and environmental sustainability, while cautioning against models that merely replicate Northern experiences without contextual adaptation. The book's interdisciplinary approach, combining economics, development studies, environmental science, and policy analysis, makes it a vital contribution to contemporary debates on green growth. Although the work could have benefited from a stronger engagement with the political economy of global trade systems, its empirical richness and policy relevance stand out. This review assesses the book's contributions, critiques its limitations, and discusses its implications for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners interested in sustainable development pathways in emerging economies.

Keywords. Circular Economy, Global South, Sustainable Industrial Development, Green Growth, Development Policy.

JEL. O14, Q56, O44.

SDGs. SDG9, SDG12.

Book Review

The concept of the circular economy (CE) has rapidly gained prominence in global sustainability debates. While initially conceptualized and operationalized within high-income countries, there is growing recognition that the Global South holds distinct opportunities—and faces particular challenges—in adopting circular models. *The Circular Economy and the Global South: Sustainable Industrial Development* emerges as a timely and comprehensive contribution to this evolving conversation. This edited volume addresses a critical knowledge



gap by exploring how circular economy principles can support sustainable industrial development in emerging and developing economies, offering empirical case studies, theoretical reflections, and policy recommendations. This review critically examines the structure, content, contributions, and limitations of the book, evaluating its relevance for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners engaged in sustainable development initiatives across diverse contexts.

2. Overview of the Book

The book is structured into four major parts, comprising a total of 16 chapters:

Part I introduces the foundations of CE in the context of the Global South, setting the theoretical and policy background.

Part II offers regional perspectives, featuring case studies from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Part III delves into enabling conditions for CE transitions, including innovation systems, financing mechanisms, and governance structures.

Part IV concludes with reflections on policy strategies and pathways forward.

The editors present a compelling argument: while CE offers substantial potential for sustainable industrial development, its models must be context-sensitive rather than transplanted wholesale from Global North experiences. The book emphasizes that environmental sustainability, economic inclusiveness, and social justice must be simultaneously pursued to make CE transitions truly transformative.

Notably, the volume draws upon a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, including environmental economics, development studies, industrial policy, and international relations.

3. Thematic Analysis

3.1 Circular Economy and Sustainable Industrialization

At its core, the volume stresses that CE in the Global South must be linked to broader goals of sustainable industrialization. This includes promoting local value addition, fostering green manufacturing, and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that often dominate Southern economies. Chapters highlight that CE is not simply about waste recycling; it requires systemic changes in production-consumption patterns, supply chain management, and resource governance.

3.2 Regional and Local Contexts

The case studies vividly illustrate how local economic structures, cultural practices, and institutional frameworks shape CE opportunities. For instance:

In Ghana, informal sectors lead recycling initiatives, offering lessons in bottom-up CE practices.

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In India, policy frameworks like the Plastic Waste Management Rules showcase both regulatory innovation and implementation challenges.

In Brazil, industrial symbiosis in eco-industrial parks presents a model for coordinated CE development.

The regional diversity represented in the book underlines that one-size-fits-all approaches are untenable. Instead, CE models must align with the socio-economic realities of specific countries and communities.

3.3 Governance, Finance, and Innovation

Another central theme is the role of governance and institutional capacity. Effective CE transitions demand supportive regulatory environments, accessible financing for innovation, and cross-sector collaboration. Several chapters argue that without deliberate public policy interventions—such as green public procurement, fiscal incentives, and infrastructure investment—CE initiatives will remain fragmented and unsustainable.

Moreover, the volume highlights the need for indigenous innovation: solutions that emerge from, and are tailored to, the specific challenges of the Global South rather than imported from external contexts.

4. Strengths of the Book

4.1 Empirical Richness

The case studies provide deep, context-sensitive insights into the realities of implementing CE principles. The detailed empirical accounts enrich theoretical discussions and ground policy recommendations in practical experience.

4.2 Interdisciplinary Approach

The integration of economics, environmental science, sociology, and political science allows for a holistic exploration of CE. This interdisciplinarity makes the book accessible to a wide range of readers and enhances its analytical depth.

4.3 Policy Relevance

The book does not merely diagnose problems but actively engages with solutions. Practical recommendations—for building enabling ecosystems, financing innovation, and scaling successful models—make it valuable for policymakers seeking actionable strategies.

4.4 Critical Reflexivity

The editors and contributors critically engage with the concept of CE itself, questioning its assumptions and applicability. This reflexivity is crucial in avoiding the uncritical promotion of CE as a panacea.

5. Limitations and Critique

5.1. Limited Engagement with Political Economy

While the book acknowledges the importance of governance, it could have offered a deeper analysis of the global political economy. For instance, the ways in which international trade systems, intellectual property regimes, and foreign direct investment patterns impact CE prospects in the Global South are underexplored.

5.2. Heterogeneity of Case Studies

Although diversity is a strength, the wide variation in case study focus and methodological approach sometimes results in a lack of coherence. Some chapters are highly empirical, while others are more theoretical, leading to occasional inconsistencies in depth and style.

5.3. Technology Transfer Issues

Although innovation is discussed, there is relatively little attention given to the challenges and politics of technology transfer from the Global North to the Global South—an issue crucial for CE development in many countries.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The Circular Economy and the Global South is a valuable and timely addition to the literature on sustainable development. It highlights the promise and pitfalls of CE transitions in emerging economies and makes a persuasive case for context-sensitive, inclusive, and innovation-driven approaches. Its empirical richness, interdisciplinary breadth, and practical orientation make it a must-read for scholars, policymakers, and development practitioners.

For future research, greater engagement with global systemic factors—such as trade, finance, and international regulation—would strengthen the analysis. Additionally, comparative studies across regions could further illuminate the conditions under which CE models thrive or falter.

Ultimately, the book reminds readers that achieving sustainable industrial development is not merely a technical challenge but a profoundly political and social one. Circular economy transitions must therefore be democratized, locally adapted, and globally just to truly contribute to a sustainable future.

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Author statements

Acknowledgements: Not applicable.

Author contributions: The contribution of the authors is equal.

Funding: No funding was received for this study.

Availability of data and materials: Not applicable.

Ethics declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate: Not applicable.

Consent for publication: Not applicable.

Consent to participate: Not applicable.

Competing interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Informed consent: Not applicable.

Consent for publication: All authors agreed with the content and gave explicit consent to submit the manuscript to *Sustainable Energy and Environmental Development*

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.



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