

DENR exec cites need to break barriers to a circular economy

By: Jonathan Mayuga, Business Mirror

The world needs to overcome the barriers to establishing a “circular economy,” a key to achieving sustainable and livable cities and ultimately achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets, an official of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said.

In his keynote speech during the kick-off ceremony of the three-day International Conference on “Connecting the Dots on Circular Economy for Sustainable Development” from November 8 to 10 in Muntinlupa City, DENR Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and International Affairs Jonas R. Leones said removing these barriers that include technical knowledge, cultural barriers and lack of financial regulatory and societal support, will lead to the shift from the current linear economy to the more sustainable circular economy.

Hosting the international conference is the country’s response to calls for extensive and rigorous intellectual collaboration among researchers, experts, and policymakers in connecting the dots to close the circular gap, said Leones.

“Given that many targets of SDGs push the boundaries of traditional development models, our cooperation for an evidence-based forward motion is imperative,” he added.

Waste management problem

According to Leones, waste management remains a challenge to many countries and cities in the developing world because of the problem tied to the linear economy.

Over the last two decades, he said countries have increasingly shifted their solid waste management policies from disposal to prevention and recycling.

Yet, the official noted that the circularity gap report as of this year states that the global economy is only 7.2 percent circular —a decrease from 8.6 percent in 2022 and 9.1 percent in 2018.

“This percentage has remained the same since 2020. The decline can be attributed to high rates of material extraction and low levels of cycling,” he pointed out.

PHL: a major waste producer

Citing a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report, the Philippines was named as the third largest source of discarded waste that ends up in the ocean.

Based on the World Bank data, the Philippines recycled around 27.8 percent of the key plastic resins in 2019, and 78 percent of the material value of plastics is lost to the Philippine economy each year, he said.

“The economic model to produce goods that we are used to is the linear economic model, where resources are taken from nature to make products that are consumed and then generate wastes, which are incinerated or disposed of in dumping sites and landfills,” he said.

Circular economy model

Leones said as opposed to the linear, a circular model looks to re-integrate resources into the urban loop—circulating rather than wasting serves to revitalize rather than deteriorate.

“The circular economy is a fundamental part of achieving the various multilateral frameworks and international agreements, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Paris Agreement, and the New Urban Agenda,” said Leones.

To push for a circular economy, the government has enacted the Extended Producers’ Responsibility Act or the Republic Act 11898, which is an amendment of the Solid Waste Management Act.

The DENR has also prioritized the mainstreaming of research, development, and extension into its various sectors, aimed at maximizing its utility, and most especially, the uptake of science to be at work at the frontiers of our daily lives.

“Managing raw materials, resources, and wastes efficiently is crucial for building sustainable and livable cities and communities. While the circular economy has significant links to the many targets under the 17 SDGs much still needs to be understood in the successful integration of the circular economy paradigm,” he said.