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IKEA Foundation

Driving Circular Economy Innovation in India and Kenya

How the Circular Economy Innovation Cluster Programme in Bengaluru and Nairobi created impact

Insights and lessons learned from 2023-2025





Who is this report for?

This report is for readers interested in innovation clusters and entrepreneurship ecosystem building, the use of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) to support them, programme design, circular economy and systems change investments. It sets out to:

01

Present the learnings from the Circular Economy Innovation Cluster (CEIC) programme implemented in Bengaluru, India and Nairobi, Kenya from 2023-2025 (phase 1), to highlight the innovation cluster approach and the opportunities it presents for systems transformation.

02

Showcase MEL as a driver of programme adaptation, decision making, and impact.



The document illustrates key learnings of the programme at different stages of development, the tensions between ambition and outcomes, and remaining gaps and opportunities. It does not intend to offer a thorough overview.

The evaluation and this report were developed by IOD PARC, an independent evaluation consultancy specialising in international development. The full evaluation can be made accessible upon request.



What is the Circular Economy Innovation Cluster (CEIC) programme?

Bengaluru and Nairobi are two dynamic and rapidly growing urban centres in India and Kenya. Both are hubs of innovation and growth yet are struggling with a core urban challenge: waste management.

Both cities generate over **2 million tonnes of waste each annually** and infrastructure is struggling to cope with the increasing volume and complexity of waste. This impacts ecosystems, livelihoods and community well-being while creating serious risks to human health and the environment.

Transitioning to circular economy principles – such as designing waste out of product lifecycles, keeping materials in use, and regenerating natural systems – offers a pathway to address this issue. However, much of this transformation goes beyond the capacity of any single entity or group.

Co-designed and delivered by Climate KIC, GrowthAfrica, and SecondMuse, and funded by the IKEA Foundation, the CEIC programme set out to tackle this challenge; by catalysing system-level transitions toward circular, low-waste urban economies. The programme began in 2023 and was implemented until December 2025 in phase 1 and has been extended for a phase 2 from 2026 to 2027 to support the transition to local ownership. The findings shared in this report are from phase 1.

CEIC's ambition is to convene diverse actors – start-ups, established businesses, government representatives, researchers, investors and informal workers - to drive upstream innovation that focuses on designing out waste and pollution in the first place, develop viable circular business models, and create more inclusive and sustainable local economies. They share ideas, resources, learning, innovation and technology. The aim is to foster a shared vision for a circular economy, develop new business models, promote skills development, mobilise capital, and provide livelihoods opportunities for local communities, helping tackle systemic challenges.

The programme's approach to MEL is driven by a recognition that transformative climate action requires a constant cycle of discovery, experimentation, and adoption: it needs testing and learning by doing. MEL has been integrated into the programme from the outset, starting with a baseline assessment, followed by a midterm review at the halfway point of the initial programme, an evaluation at the end of 2025, and sensemaking sessions throughout. Sensemaking is the deliberate exploration of information, patterns, and experiences to derive insights that inform decision-making and action. The evidence generated has been used to review and adapt the programme approach biannually to the shifting context and emerging learning.

2023-2025

SENSEMAKING

Sensemaking workshops were used throughout the programme. Team members from the implementing organisations Climate KIC, GrowthAfrica and SecondMuse would present new evidence on how the approach was progressing and this would be discussed by the team.

The sensemaking sessions allowed the team to continually collect evidence on the programme's contribution to wider changes, as well as building the understanding of the entire programme team and allowing them to learn what works, leveraging knowledge from both cities and networks.



2023

BASELINE

An assessment was carried out in both cities to map out the relevant stakeholders, provide a political economy analysis and to guide the design of the programme.

The assessments revealed there was a gap in support for upstream circular solutions in both cities. The programme team decided to focus on designing waste out of the system as opposed to primarily focusing on reusing or recycling of waste, which helped the programme find its purpose.

2024

MID-TERM REVIEW

An external, independent mid-term review was carried out by IOD PARC. The review looked at the programme operations as well as early signs of change.

The review prompted a rethink aspects of programme implementation. For example in Bengaluru a local PR company was hired to communicate the activities through local media. In Nairobi, more of the programme implementation was brought in-house e.g. the social inclusion modules, to make sure they were embedded in the programme, not just an add-on.

2025

FINAL EVALUATION

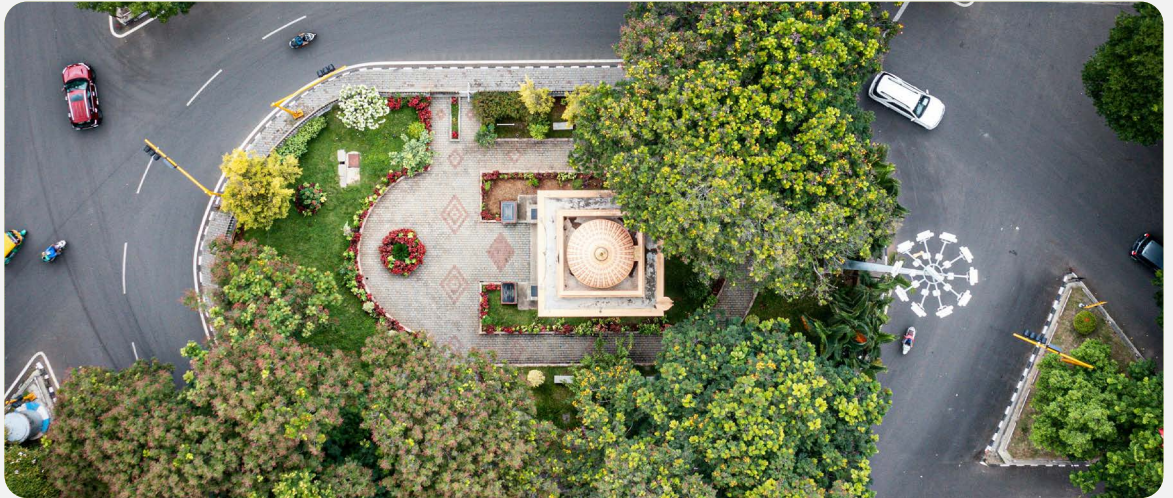
The same evaluation team conducted the final evaluation of the programme, allowing continuity. The final evaluation focused on the programme outcomes to a greater extent, helping evidence the results.

The final evaluation recommended a focus on sustainability in the programme extension. This includes developing a sustainability plan in collaboration with key local stakeholders, with the aim to identify and support custodians of the programme that will stay in the city and carry the momentum forward into the future.



How was the programme designed?

The programme began with baseline assessments in each city, undertaken by local external agencies. Through a literature review, stakeholder mapping, surveys and interviews with key stakeholders, the baselines provided a contextual understanding of the waste sector and innovation environment in the cities. They provided information on the scale of the issue, the key players, the policy environment and key opportunities. The context was striking:



Bengaluru

With over 13 million residents across the vast city, Bengaluru generates over 6,000 tonnes of waste a day, enough to fill 5 Olympic-sized swimming pools. Around 30 per cent of waste is collected by the city municipality whilst the remaining 70 per cent is left to be managed through private, contracted services.

Limited collaboration amongst ecosystem players leads to ineffectiveness in waste management. What's more, despite the burgeoning innovation environment in Bengaluru, there remains a lack of support for solutions that reduce waste at the source. The lack of investment in the working conditions of informal waste pickers is also a key challenge. Workers are often exposed to harsh conditions leading to health concerns and other related complexities.



Nairobi

Nairobi, home to over 5.5 million people, produces over 3,000 tonnes of waste per day, enough to fill more than 2 Olympic-sized swimming pools. Around 70 per cent of this waste is not collected, posing environmental and health risks, particularly for populations in low-income areas. Nairobi's circular economy ecosystem is largely informal and the waste management system highly fragmented.

Despite national and county policies, such as Kenya's Sustainable Waste Management Act and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations, a gap in upstream innovation persists as policy enforcement, financing mechanisms, and stakeholder coordination remain limited, resulting in insufficient incentives for sustainable product design and waste prevention.

The baseline assessments revealed a major market gap in **upstream circular innovation** (preventing waste at the design or production stage). Most existing support focused on downstream waste management (managing waste after it is created through recycling or reusing waste), whilst upstream innovation and waste prevention remained underfunded and largely untapped.



After identifying this gap, the programme prioritised upstream solutions across nine waste sectors including organic waste (food and agricultural materials), dry waste (plastics, glass, metals, and paper), construction waste, textiles, and e-waste (discarded electronics). This helped the programme find its focus.



“Our journey reflects a shift from viewing plastic waste as a downstream cleanup issue to understanding it as an upstream design and data challenge. Through the programme, we refined our focus on helping manufacturers understand and mitigate packaging risks before products enter the market. By engaging with regulators, Producer Responsibility Organisations (PROs), and manufacturers in Nairobi, ECKEKA has deepened its understanding of circularity as a system - where data, regulation, and design choices must work together. Learning continues to shape our platform that supports practical compliance, transparency, and circular decision-making, grounded in real operational realities rather than abstract sustainability goals”.

Nairobi

Janerose Gatobu, Founder of ECKEKA

BENGALURU

NAIROBI

Innovation clusters by Climate KIC and local partners strengthen climate innovation ecosystems by connecting diverse actors who typically work in isolation, fostering collaboration, learning and innovation to build long-term positive change.

7

key programmatic activities

were implemented, including incubation and acceleration incl. access to finance support to startups and circular solutions, capacity trainings to public and private groups, stakeholder fora including community based organisations, supporting:

22

ventures across

9

waste sectors

30

ventures across

7

waste sectors

63

connections

89

beneficiaries

40

partners

145

stakeholders engaged

81

connections

77

beneficiaries

62

partners

167

stakeholders engaged

contributing to:

99Kt



119Kt

potential avoided GHG emissions per year (tCO₂eq)

590+

informal workers supported



950+

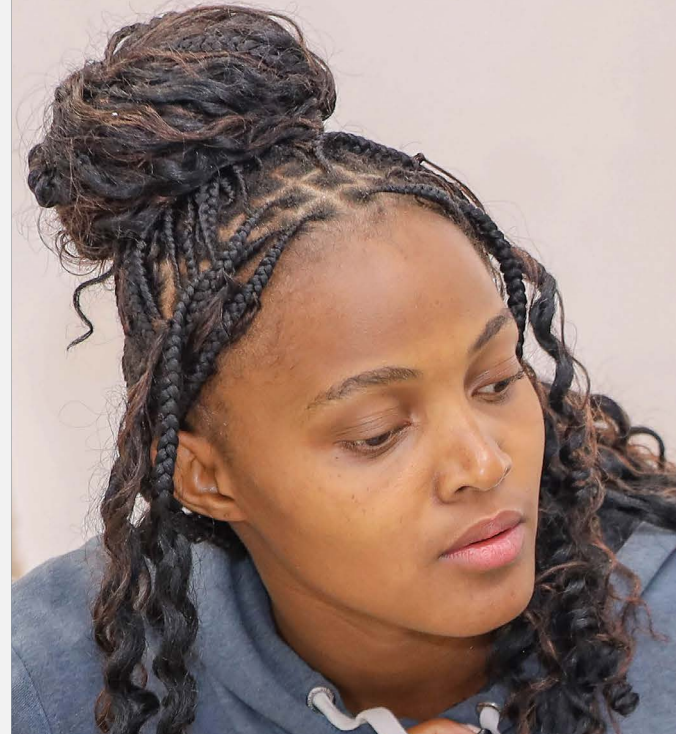
with safer working conditions



How does the programme build an ecosystem for effective collaboration?

Systems-level change is essential for a circular economy. Networks are fundamental to this, for example, connecting private and public sector actors, and for the scaling of solutions. Therefore, the baseline assessment also identified gaps in the way that actors work together. It did this through a **social network analysis**, mapping out the key actors in waste, their interests, the existing links between them and opportunities for new ones.

Following this analysis, the programme organised **kick-off and visioning** workshops in both cities during the first six months. These brought together key players in the circular economy and upstream innovation to introduce the initiative, share and validate the baseline assessment results and plant the seeds for future collaboration. This collaboration continued and evolved.



For example, in **Bengaluru**, CEIC has partnered with the **Bengaluru Science and Technology (BeST) cluster**, bringing together government, industry, and civil society actors around shared priorities. Through public events, investor summits, and government dialogues, the programme has strengthened recognition of circularity.

In **Nairobi**, CEIC has built connections between public and private sector actors including recyclers, tech innovators, Nairobi City Council, community-based organisations and waste pickers. **Stakeholder forums** have helped identify common challenges and barriers to scaling circular innovation, establishing working groups that have fostered more coordinated dialogue on circularity.





However, **this was not without its challenges.**

Establishing a cluster and building trust with the right stakeholders is a long process, particularly if the programme does not have a track record in the region.

Yearly reviews or evaluations

showed the team how the networks were progressing and where they were being effective. The evaluation team used **outcome harvesting** to map out where the programme was achieving results and with which actors. The outcomes were then used to develop **network maps**, with the lines between actors showing where early connections had been established and where these had flourished into collaboration*.

This showed where the programme was gaining traction. For example, the mid-term review showed the programme had early success in bringing entrepreneurship support organisations (ESOs) and companies together, whereas progress with investors and policymakers was slower. This ongoing feedback helped guide the programme focus. After the review, the programme shifted focus to deepening connections with weaker parts of the ecosystem, such as finance for solutions that have been piloted but don't have the means to scale.

This map shows the connections formed between stakeholders in Bengaluru. This is based on evidence collected through the outcome harvesting process in the midterm review and final evaluation.

* We distinguish different degrees of engagement between actors in an ecosystems. While many connections can exist, often these are just “networking”, that is, actors know and talk to each other. “Collaboration” in this case is when two or more actors develop joint activities, with shared objectives, resources and goals.

CIRCULAR START-UPS

COHORT

PRE-INCUBATOR

CGF

COACH

JOURNEY PARTICIPANTS

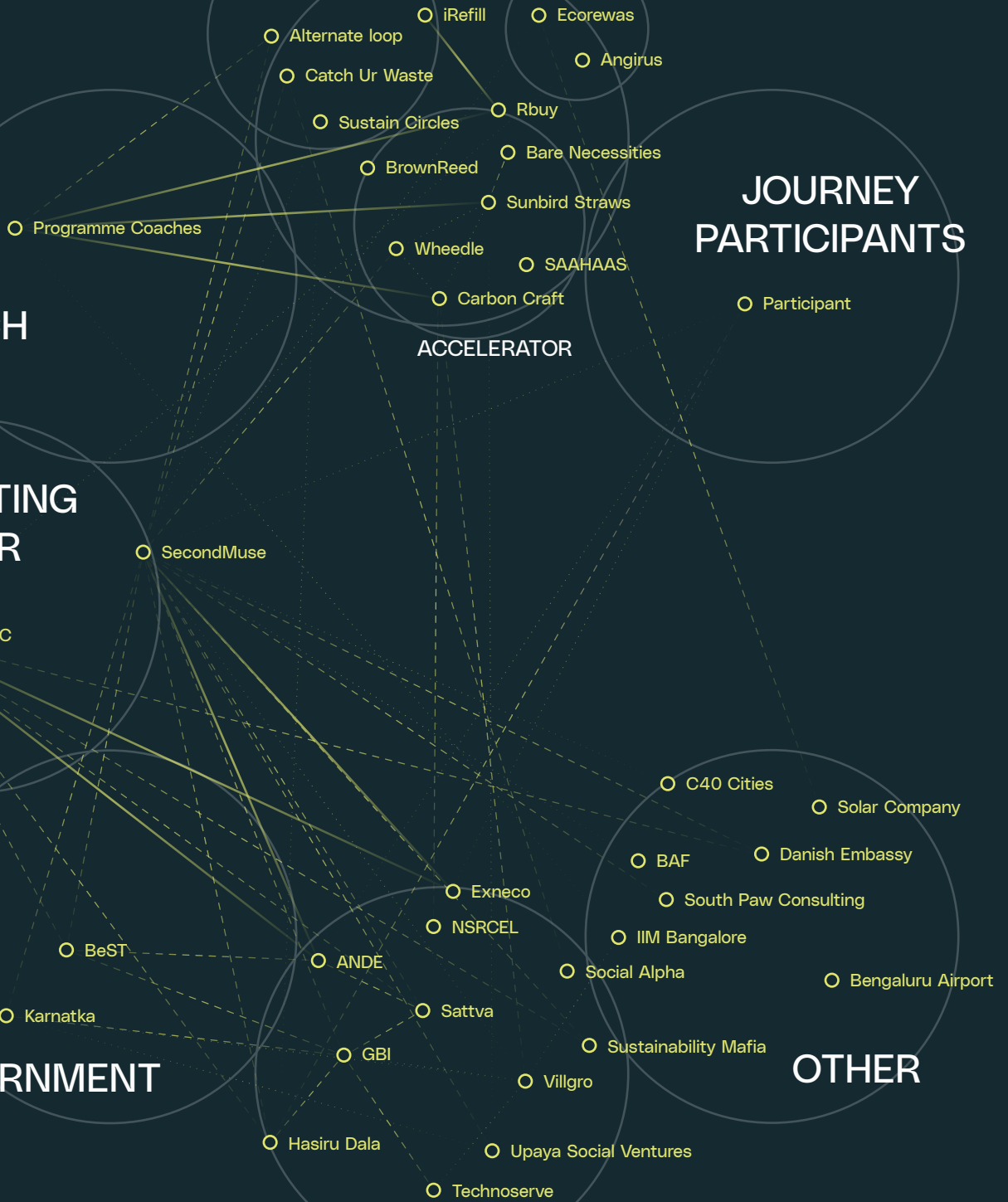
ACCELERATOR

IMPLEMENTING PARTNER

GOVERNMENT

OTHER

ESO



This map shows the connections formed between stakeholders in Bengaluru. This is based on evidence collected through the outcome harvesting process in the midterm review and final evaluation.

Extended collaboration
Some collaboration
Early collaboration



Bengaluru

The programme's efforts to bring different actors together created opportunities for sharing technical knowledge, opening new market channels, and introducing peers to suppliers, investors and government policymakers.

For example, several start-ups in Bengaluru, introduced through CEIC, are now buying products from each other: **Bare Necessities** – a women-led company producing high-quality, plastic-free personal care, home care, and lifestyle products - purchased products for their hampers from **Saving Grains** - a company focused on upcycling brewers' spent grain into nutritious food products.

The programme focused on quality engagement by keeping each cohort small, with 7-8 ventures, enabling personalised one-to-one coaching. This support continued even after the programme ended, recognising that ventures require extended engagement to refine their solutions and scale.







Bengaluru

To de-risk innovation, early-stage ventures received catalytic grants, along with tailored technical assistance and guidance from experienced experts, a combination many entrepreneurs found highly relevant and instrumental. Flexibility in milestones allowed ventures to develop solutions at their own pace, while regular interactions with the programme team helped identify gaps, build trust, and solve challenges collaboratively.

For example, **Green Aadhar** assisted **Angirus** and **Reverse** in digitalising inventories and workflows, improving their operational efficiency. Sustained engagement enabled ventures to build long-term mentor relationships; one coach became a formal advisor and investor in one of the cohort ventures due to trust and collaboration built over time.

By combining grants, expert guidance, flexible support, peer collaboration, and lasting mentor relationships, the programme created a trust-based ecosystem where ventures could innovate and collaborate effectively.

Similarly, **Ecorenowa**, one of the programme's awardees, were provided connections to a large solar power company to procure old solar panels for recycling, allowing them to expand their business and their environmental impact.



“Working with CEIC on advancing circular economy initiatives in Bengaluru has been an enriching and strategically valuable experience for the BeST Cluster. CEIC brought strong systems thinking and global circular economy expertise, while remaining deeply grounded in the local urban context.

Our joint work, including the Circular Economy brainstorming discussion held at Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru Bengaluru in September 2025, helped convene government, academia, industry, start-ups, funders, and civil society on a single platform, enabling constructive dialogue on policy, market, operational, and behavioural challenges in solid waste management. We particularly valued Climate KIC’s emphasis on breaking silos, strengthening market linkages, and embedding innovation within public systems, while keeping social inclusion and citizen participation at the centre of circular economy transitions.

Their collaborative approach complemented BeST Cluster’s role as a city-level knowledge and multi-stakeholder collaborative platform, enabling us to collectively align research, policy insights, and on-ground implementation. We look forward to continuing this partnership to drive scalable, systemic circular economy solutions for Bengaluru.”

Bengaluru



**Nidhya Nadarajan, Project Manager,
Bengaluru Science and Technology (BeST) Cluster**



In Nairobi, linkages between ventures such as **PurePlant** and **Crofts** have led to product testing, certifications, reduced waste and improved operations. Pureplant produces biochar (an organic fertiliser) using discarded agricultural waste such as rice husks. Crofts manufactures avocado oil using rejected avocados. A collaboration between the two companies, facilitated by CEIC, enabled PurePlant to trial its biochar on Crofts' 200-acre farm, improving product testing and helping PurePlant to secure Kenya Bureau of Standards certification.



“Over the past three years implementing the Circular Economy Innovation Cluster in Nairobi, the ecosystem has grown from fragmented efforts into a more connected, confident community. A total of 32 entrepreneurs participated in the programme, with 18 receiving grants to test and scale their circular solutions.

Through our Training of Trainers programme, capacity was built among ecosystem support organisations and government officials, helping lay the groundwork for more supportive policies. The cluster strengthened links between private companies, NGOs, policymakers, and informal waste pickers, and hosted investor showcases that encouraged conversations on de-risking circular investments.

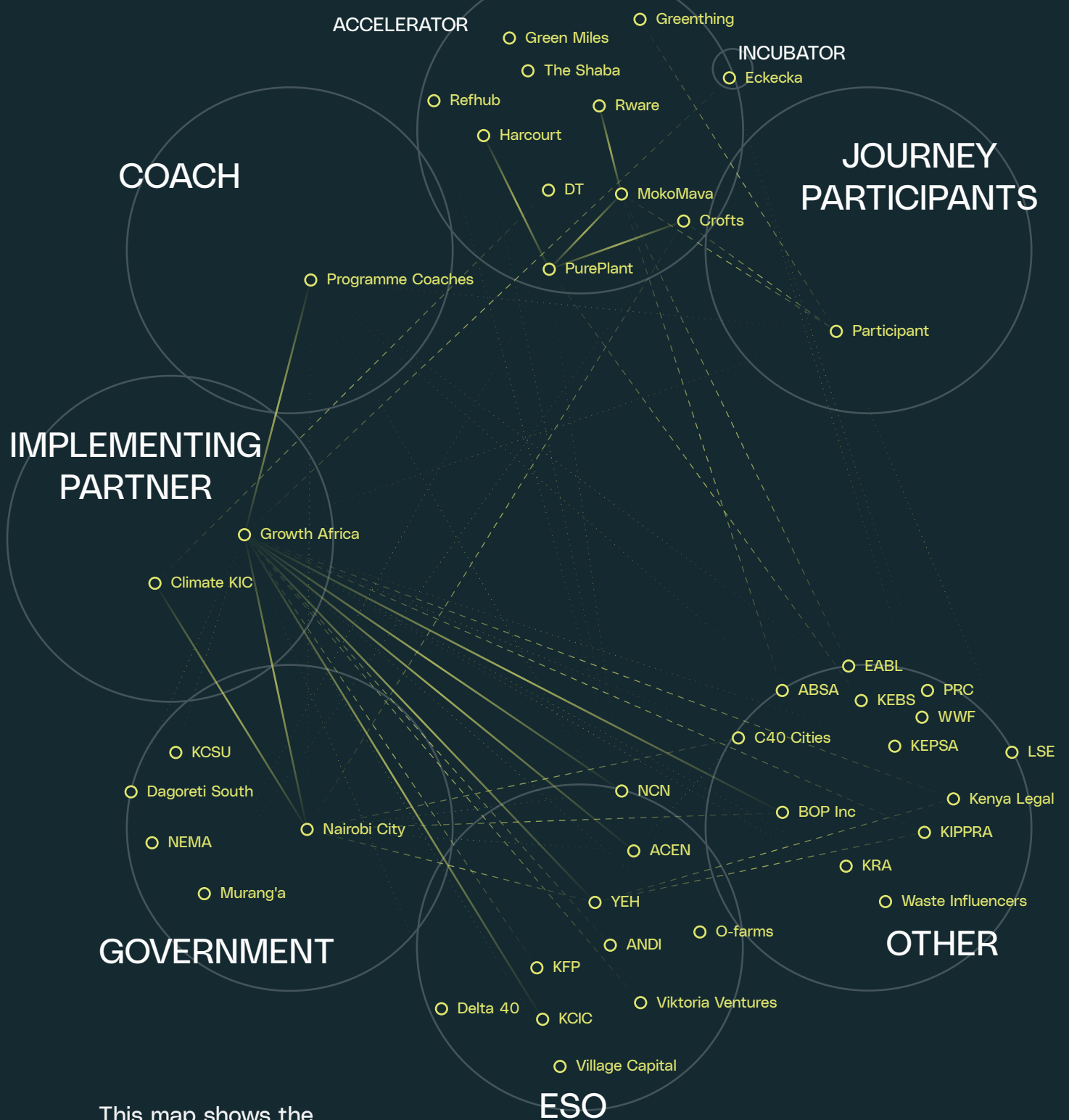
Most encouraging has been the shift towards local leadership, supported by the Circular Venture Blueprint: A Guide for Entrepreneurship Support Organisations. As GrowthAfrica and Climate KIC are leading CEIC here in Nairobi, funded by IKEA Foundation, this transition to locally owned systems is the legacy we aim to build.”

Nairobi



Patricia Jumi - Co-Founder and Executive Director – GrowthAfrica

CIRCULAR START-UPS COHORT



This map shows the connections formed between stakeholders in Nairobi. This is based on evidence collected through the outcome harvesting process in the midterm review and final evaluation.

Extended collaboration
Some collaboration
Early collaboration



How does the programme support social inclusion and a just transition?

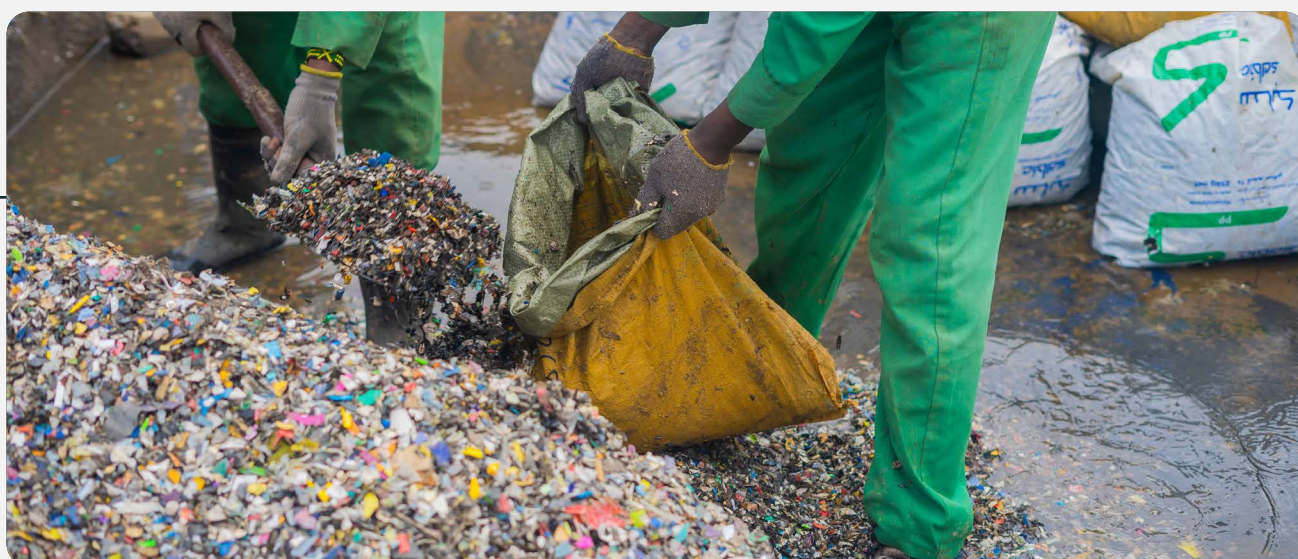
While it creates numerous societal challenges, **the waste and recycling sector is also the basis for thousands of people's livelihoods** in Bengaluru and Nairobi. Many of these are informal workers, including itinerant or landfill waste pickers and street sweepers, for example. These informal workers are mostly from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, when designing out waste, there is potential to take away people's source of livelihood.

The baseline assessments pointed towards the need to include these workers in the programme activities to ensure a just transition. Through a combination of **surveys, evaluation and sensemaking** with local partners this analysis was deepened. After some early social inclusion modules for start-ups, CEIC found that broaching this topic required quality, not quantity i.e. social inclusion requires a different, complementary approach with specific expertise.



The programme subsequently brought in partners with expertise and targeted start-ups with a social innovation focus. **Following the re-designed social inclusion modules as part of the acceleration activities, entrepreneurs increasingly recognised the importance of fair and safe engagement with informal workers.**

Despite challenges including limited access to informal worker networks, sociocultural barriers to personal protective equipment (PPE) adoption and the complex politics of waste management; several businesses demonstrated shifts in models and practices following the development of social inclusion plans. **Over 1,550 informal workers were supported through the programme.**



Improving working conditions for mothers

In Nairobi, **Rware Waste Dealers** – a sustainable and responsible waste management company – and **EcoCharge** – a renewable energy company that produces biomass briquettes from agriculture and wood waste – have retained women on payroll and provided daycare facilities while making improvements in safe work and PPE use.



Informal Workers

Green Miles Zero Waste Services – a waste management and recovery company - now provides access to health services for informal workers including mental health support, healthcare and social welfare programmes, and have made waste disposal more accessible for disabled workers, for example, through the provision of mobile sorting equipment.

Access to health

In Bengaluru, following the mid-term review, the programme saw a gap in support for more established businesses that engage informal workers. Subsequently, the programme offers **equity-free grants and training** to more mature start-ups that have a strong social inclusion element to help catalyse solutions in waste prevention, textile recycling, and material reuse. Several businesses such as **Sunbird Straws** – a company transforming fallen coconut leaves into 100 per cent biodegradable straws - were able to hire more informal workers following their expansion, creating jobs in the local economy.





“Participation in this programme has enabled MokoMaya to assess critical areas requiring strengthening and to acquire the tools and capacity necessary to address them effectively. As a result, we have expanded and clarified our engagement and reach within the community. The programme has also supported us in adopting a more comprehensive approach to our production process, allowing us to address the full circular nature of production rather than focusing solely on the final product.

In addition, MokoMaya was recently awarded a Social Inclusion Grant, through the CEIC programme, which will allow us to improve our working environment and make it more conducive for the women we employ. This funding will also enhance workplace safety and provide greater protection for our workers as they carry out their roles.”

Nyandia Kamawe, Founder of MokoMaya



How does the programme develop awareness and capacity on circularity?

The programme works towards greater recognition of circularity, evidenced by coordinated dialogues, public-private working groups, and more coherent systems level engagements in both cities. Two key elements of this work are the circular venture blueprint and circularity impact assessment.

ESO Principles - How the Circular Venture Blueprint strengthened Seedstars' capacity and addressed ecosystem gaps.

“The application of the Circular Venture Blueprint enabled Seedstars to support circular economy ventures through a structured, credible, and scalable methodology. The framework equipped founders with the capability to precisely define their circular business models, articulate value propositions beyond conventional growth metrics, and communicate impact in terms that are meaningful to investors and strategic partners.

Enhanced ecosystem coordination reduced market fragmentation by establishing common definitions and aligned expectations among entrepreneurial support organisations, investors, and value chain stakeholders. The shift from compliance-oriented monitoring to adaptive programme management improved institutional coherence, utilising milestones as learning mechanisms rather than accountability checkpoints.

Collectively, this approach addressed critical knowledge gaps within the entrepreneurial support ecosystem and among policy stakeholders. It replaced conceptual ambiguity with operational frameworks, standardised terminology, and evidence-based decision-making structures grounded in the documented.”

Bengaluru



Tom Sebastian,
Asia Regional Director, Seedstars

The Circular Venture Blueprint: a guide for Entrepreneurship Support Organisations

The MEL processes helped highlight another key barrier. Through sensemaking workshops with ESOs, incubators, accelerators and investors, CEIC identified gaps in circular economy understanding and capacity to assess circular impact. Circularity is not well understood by many ESOs, which limits the quality of support that ventures receive.

To support more coherent systems level work, CEIC co-created the Circular Venture Blueprint with 14 organisations across Bengaluru and Nairobi.

The blueprint is grounded in a critical insight: circular ventures are fundamentally different from traditional start-ups. These ventures often operate within complex systems, require longer development timelines, and generate value across environmental, social and economic dimensions. As a result, they demand specialised support structures with a deep understanding of circular design, impact measurement and evolving market dynamics.

The result is an **open-source, practitioner-led knowledge base** that equips ESOs with practical tools, methodologies, shared terminology, and global case studies to deepen their circular economy expertise. By aligning ESOs around common standards and practices, the blueprint reduces fragmentation, increases efficiency, and accelerates the scaling of circular solutions. There has been extensive interest in the blueprint. ESOs in both cities reported that CEIC raised the profile of circular economy work and there have been over 8,000 downloads to date.





Circularity Impact Assessment

CEIC provided 34 start-ups with the opportunity to complete **Circularity Assessment and Validation Reports as well as Climate Impact Calculations**. The results allowed them to strengthen their pitches and better articulate environmental, circular and social impact, helping them engage customers and potential investors. Subsequently, ventures developed more circular driven solutions, improved operational systems and adapted their business strategies.

For example, several start-ups enhanced their energy and waste efficiency following the validation reports. **PurePlant** organics in Nairobi invested in a solar dryer as opposed to an electric one, expanding their capacity to produce fertiliser from organic waste whilst reducing their energy use. Several other start-ups developed their value propositions and aligned their products more closely with market needs.

iRefill in Bengaluru – a company which develops product dispensing systems - initially targeted large brands but shifted focus to wholesalers and retailers, resulting in successful dispenser installations in Bengaluru and Indore. **Sunbird Straws** used the estimates of CO₂-eq avoided from their straws in their external communications to consumers. Similarly, **Nairobi City County** reported improved use of data analytics to track waste trends.

More generally, CEIC contributed to better understanding of upstream circular innovation including for early-stage entrepreneurs.



“I’ve gained insights into sustainable sourcing practices, waste reduction strategies, and innovative ways to integrate circularity at the early stages of production. This has enabled me to implement more effective and environmentally conscious practices within our supply chain, enhancing both sustainability and value creation for our products’ (Journey Participant). It means the business leaders of the future are more optimistic about the impact they can have: “I think we make a larger impact when through collective individual efforts and with such trainings, we the upcoming generation can make a huge impact in the future by shifting to innovative solutions that will impact the environment in a positive way and most importantly get empowered.”

CEIC Participant – Early Stage Entrepreneur



How does the programme build supply and demand for circular solutions?

CEIC provided entrepreneurship and acceleration support to start-ups at various stages of maturity. However, the MEL activities including the baseline assessments, evaluations and sensemaking quickly showed that there were numerous accelerators in the Bengaluru and Nairobi ecosystems. Therefore, the programme risked duplication, creating dependency and limited ability to scale. There also remains **limited public awareness on circularity** with low understanding of waste segregation, extended producer responsibility regulations and circular products which hinders both demand and policy enforcement.

In response, CEIC identified gaps in support and tried to address more systemic challenges including policy and finance.

For example, rather than replicating what was already there, the programme implemented a pre-incubator and incubator, offering seed funding, hands on mentorship, and training for fledgling circular economy businesses. More established start-ups were supported to grow through an accelerator and equity-free grants. These activities provided capacity building workshops, one-on-one business coaching, climate and circular impact assessments, and exposure to circular economy best practices. The Journey programme educated young entrepreneurs, whilst training for Nairobi County government officials supported their push to implement EPR, focus on upstream innovation, and move beyond waste management and recycling initiatives.



Bengaluru



“As a local implementation partner, SecondMuse saw the CEIC demonstrate what’s possible when systems thinking, local leadership, and entrepreneurship come together with purpose. In Bengaluru, the programme focused mainly on upstream solutions—helping ventures prevent waste at the source rather than managing it later—while also strengthening collaboration between start-ups, informal workers, government, investors, and ecosystem partners.

Catalytic funding, tailored mentorship, coaching, and other cluster activities helped ventures at different stages test, adapt, and grow their circular solutions. At the same time, the programme worked to improve conditions for informal workers, reduce waste and emissions, and increase awareness and recognition of circularity.

Just as importantly, the programme built strong foundations for long-term impact through continuous learning and local leadership. By creating communities of practice and shifting ownership to local actors, CEIC demonstrated how innovation clusters can continue beyond the life of a programme when supported by ongoing investment, strong partnerships, and shared accountability.”

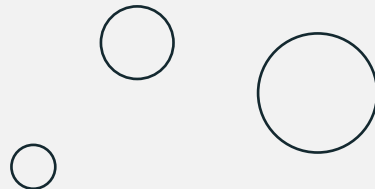
Laura Bennis,
Director Programmes, SecondMuse



In terms of what supported change, the programme evaluations found several key factors. Given the complexity of the sector, programme participants highly valued the mentoring and support provided by programme coaches. The coaches offered targeted business advice, introductions to investors and support on communication and impact measurement.

- **Flexible early-stage finance** offered through the incubator, ClimAccelerators and grant facilities helped businesses jumpstart prototypes, pivots, and product development.
- **In-person workshops, forums bringing together diverse ecosystem actors, and cross-cohort interactions and site visits** boosted collaboration and confidence among founders.

Despite improvements in business models and expansion to new market sectors, the most successful solutions still require larger amounts of funding to truly scale up solutions. Pilots often fail due to the lack of investment and high perceived risk on the part of investors and other actors which is why CEIC played a catalytic role to help start-ups take the leap to the next level.



What are the key takeaways?

CEIC demonstrated substantial reach by connecting over 350 key players, including entrepreneurs, businesses, government agencies, investors, ESOs and informal workers in Bengaluru and Nairobi. The programme supported over 124 collaborations and had systemic influence across nine waste sectors, including organic waste, construction waste, textile waste and e-waste. It contributed to:

- **Improved working conditions and inclusion of informal workers** through safer practices, access to health and social services, formalisation of employment structures, and enhanced social inclusion.
- **Reduced waste and 218 kt CO₂eq/year reduction potential** through improved circular business models, energy efficient technologies, and strengthened operational processes among start-ups.
- **Enhanced collaboration across ecosystems**, enabling start-ups to connect to buyers, suppliers, peers, investors, and government actors, reducing market barriers and accelerating innovation.

The programme offers a number of lessons for future MEL design. One is the importance of co-designing the MEL approach with those responsible for delivery. This ensures that the MEL approach is realistic and useful. It is also a key opportunity for the programme team to speak with key stakeholders and start building their understanding of the context as well as their network.

Furthermore, local partners hold key knowledge and understanding of their context. Good, context-specific MEL is supported when local capacity is built, for example, through training in key methodologies and impact storytelling. In the case of CEIC, outcome harvesting has been used throughout to collect evidence of change from the programme team and partners. Project teams were trained on the methodology to ensure they are collecting and analysing the right data to evidence their contribution to change.



Stakeholders highlighted that learning and adaptation improved when MEL activities were more regular

(e.g. biannual sensemaking workshops). Short, timely evaluation deliverables allow for evidence to be quickly used for decision making. MEL should be positioned as a continuous learning process, not periodic reporting. This can include frequent reflection sessions, simple social network analysis and stories of success. Not only does this support learning but it can also help the project team see their progress.

The CEIC programme has shown the importance of finding the right partners with the right skills.

Climate KIC, GrowthAfrica and SecondMuse drove the programme forward, using their organisational expertise and experience to achieve progress towards a circular economy innovation cluster in Bengaluru and Nairobi.

The second phase, running from January 2026 until March 2027, is expanding on this approach, bringing together consortiums of local partners with complementary skills, knowledge and networks. This kind of approach could present an interesting proposition for donors, potentially allowing them to provide larger and longer-term pots of funding to tackle our society's most complex challenges. In both cities, these networks continued beyond CEIC hosted events, an indicator that the relationships created were meaningful and actionable.



Start-ups, especially those working with hardware or recycling processes, need **larger and longer-term** investment (e.g. plant installation, machinery, laboratory testing). However, multiple similar programmes and projects funded by different actors fragment the funding available. This highlights the need for more coherent and sustained support: larger, consolidated funding pools that can support ventures from early-stage through to maturity, ensuring circular innovations have the time and resources to achieve impact.

Looking at sustainability, the learnings from the CEIC programme underline the importance of developing a sustainability plan early. The plan should be developed with key stakeholders and should outline key roles and responsibilities, effectively passing on ownership to the people that will remain in the ecosystem after the end of the programme.

In the case of CEIC, the programme team is supporting a core group of stakeholders in each city to take key activities forward, as a Community of Practice. They will receive support to continue and expand the work that has been started. The next phase requires continued investment, strong local stewardship, and broader coalitions to carry momentum forward.

The CEIC programme demonstrates the transformative potential of **locally anchored, collaboratively built innovation clusters** in accelerating the transition to a circular economy. By embedding continuous learning, fostering cross sector collaboration, and empowering entrepreneurs and informal workers alike, CEIC has laid the groundwork for long term, sustained circular innovation in both cities.





Access the key resources and programme products here:

Circular Venture Blueprint

A Guide For Entrepreneurship Support Organisations

Circularity Impact Assessment Services

Baseline assessments

Bengaluru

Nairobi

Take action!

If you're interested, join us in scaling circular innovation. Get in touch if you want to connect with the programme and its partners.

entrepreneurship@climate-kic.org



Contact

entrepreneurship@climate-kic.org