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## Circular economy can spur growth in tourism sector

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The tourism industry happens to be one of the biggest users of plastic. FILE PHOTO | NMG

A circular economy is not an entirely new concept. The Netherlands, for instance, is working on going fully circular by 2050.

This means its economy will run fully on reusable raw materials. It is an idea that is looking quite popular in the tiny European nation sandwiched between Belgium and Germany.

Many businesses and NGOs are signing up for a 100 per cent circular economy.

Like other concepts, the circular economy has its antithesis, which also happens to be the dominant economic model. As the name suggests, a linear economy is simply take, make, waste economic model. It is an outdated energy system. Linear economy assumes that resources are infinite and that irrespective of how we use them, they always regenerate themselves for the benefit of man. But we now know that resources are finite. In fact, our world as we know it has its limits beyond which it cannot be stretched any further.

Therefore, if we do not manage our resources intelligently and sustainably, there will be nothing to hand over to the next generation.

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This is where the circular economy comes in.

Circular economy basically is borne out of the reality that we must manage better and fast to create both prosperity and sustainability. It brings different elements together to drive towards a low-carbon economy. It is about rethinking, redesigning use of materials, reusing (repairing, refurbishing, remanufacturing) and recycling.

The ultimate goal is to not have waste. What this means is that everything which is no longer needed is not disposed of but turned into something else of value. But this poses another challenge.

We are making the assumption that everything shall be made of material or parts that can be remoulded into good-quality material, which can be used to make a similar or a different item.

Considering the sheer amount of poor-quality gadgets that flood our markets, going full circular will require more than lofty policy pronouncements.

### **Water bottles**

It might have significant cost implications to consumers, at least at the time of initial purchase, but then the item so purchased will create more value to the consumer.

The tourism industry, which lives off the environment and markets the environment at the same time, also happens to be one of the biggest users of plastic.

Water consumed by millions of tourists who visit Kenya every year is packaged in tens of millions of water bottles.

The question every tourism industry player should ask is, “what is my footprint of single-use plastic per day, month or annum?”

Single-use plastics end up in our landfills or find their way into the ocean, yet they are not biodegradable? It is a tragedy of unimaginable proportions that every minute one truck full of plastic waste is dumped into the oceans.

Plastics and single-use plastics, in particular, exhaust raw material resources, take hundreds of years to decompose and release toxic chemicals into our environment causing hormone disruptions and cancers, polluting our land and sea and killing marine animal and birds.

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