

A New Circular Vision

Circular Sessions

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INTRO

Executive Summary

The damaging environmental and social impacts of the apparel industry are widely recognized, but awareness alone isn't enough.

There's a rising demand for a bold reimagining of apparel's future—one that embraces circularity, diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

This paper explores the urgent calls for change and the need for collaborative, system-wide conversations that can push the industry toward a more circular, sustainable and just future. The time for incremental change is over—the future demands completely reshaping how the apparel industry operates.

In 2023, 60 participants came together across five workshops to share their insights on the future of the apparel industry. Their goal? To envision a positive, regenerative future grounded in the principles of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ). The conversations that took place provided the foundation for this report, offering a collective view on where the industry stands and where it needs to go.

The discussions were guided by the Three Horizons framework, a tool that helps map out change by looking at three stages: the present, the emerging future, and the visionary future. Using this approach, participants first assessed the current state of the apparel industry, then envisioned an ideal future and finally pinpointed the systems and strategies needed to bridge the gap.

This structured process sparked conversations around what's working, what needs to evolve, what needs to be replaced, and how to drive that transformation from linear to circular. Research shows that envisioning a shared future can ignite innovation, collaboration, and action—fueling the real change the industry urgently needs.

This paper brings to light some of the unspoken challenges in the apparel industry, showing how including diverse perspectives can lead to powerful insights. It offers a hopeful vision of what's possible when we work together toward a circular future.

Covening for a Circular Vision

This Circular Vision paper emerged from a series of five workshops I convened in 2023, inspired by Bill Sharpe's Three Horizons Framework¹. This structure finally gave me a tool to address the gaps that I'd experienced in conferences and conversations within the apparel and circular economy sectors for decades.

After nearly 20 years working in sustainability, I found the discussions stagnant, frustrating, and disconnected from the system-level change we need. Too often, we were relying on tools and mindsets tied to outdated systems, missing the visionary thinking needed for real transformation.

What became clear to me is this: the process itself — of stepping away from the present and reimagining a circular future — is as critical as the findings. Convening a diverse group of voices, setting aside our day-to-day routines, and collaborating across disciplines is how meaningful circular change begins. This process of working collectively is not just about reaching solutions; it is itself part of the solution.

One of the key outcomes of this effort was simply creating the space for intersectional conversations that are too rare in the circular community today. Our Zoom rooms didn't look like the usual conference rooms, and that difference mattered. Bringing together voices from apparel, recycling, and circular design — voices that wouldn't typically be in conversation — was an outcome in itself.



— Nicole Bassett
Sustainability and
Circularity Professional

1. <https://www.internationalfuturesforum.com/p/three-horizons-the-patterning-of-hope>

The Workshops

This experience highlighted a persistent gap: there isn't enough diversity or intersectional dialogue in the circular economy space. We are still learning what it means to create truly inclusive environments, where power is shared and voices are equitably heard.

The workshops allowed all of us to break the boundaries of the present, to step outside the limitations of what we know now and spend real time imagining a circular future. The Three Horizons Framework was key to this. It encouraged participants to acknowledge the constraints of existing systems, articulate aspirational visions for the future, and think creatively about bridging the two.

Through this process, we challenged conventional thinking and uncovered new possibilities. The outcome wasn't just the vision we created but the act of creating it together — learning from each other, challenging our assumptions, and seeing the circular future through fresh perspectives.

This Circular Vision paper is a product of the workshops, but the workshops themselves were the foundation for transformation. Building the kind of visionary future that the climate crisis demands requires not only bold ideas but also new ways of working together.

The process of inclusion, collaboration, and stepping outside the constraints of the present isn't just a means to an end — it's an essential part of creating a circular economy that is equitable, sustainable, and visionary. Together, we are learning how to do this work, and we invite others to join us in holding the ground for inclusion, diversity, and imagination in circular change.

Core Values of the Workshops

1. Bring together individuals from diverse disciplines and backgrounds to spark creativity, challenge assumptions, and build a shared vision.
2. Create an inclusive space where ideas can flow freely and collectively shape a positive circular future.
3. Step outside traditional frameworks and embrace uncertainty and possibility.
4. Recognize that we don't have all the answers, but by listening and being open, we can uncover new and transformative approaches.

Project Intention, Our Scoping Statement

The Three Horizons Framework uses a tool called a Scoping Statement to create the container that defines the boundaries and focus of the work within which the process will take place.

The Scoping Statement follows this structure:

Rather than being rooted in abstract theory, The Coaching Habit provides practical, actionable next-day-ready tools and training to help managers apply their new skills.

OF Something (Topic of Concern)
The Future of...

BY Someone (Who are we?)
The people who are convened for this...

FOR a purpose (how we will use it?)
To...

Our Scoping Statement is as follows:

The future of a circular economy in the apparel industry over the next 20 years.

Stakeholders in the industry who are interested in exploring circular as a possible future.

Convening to create a vision to transform our economy towards one that is inclusive and regenerative.

Project Structure

Sixty people participated in five workshops. Participants were selected for their expertise in apparel, recycling, and circularity. The group was intentionally diverse to ensure a broad range of voices and perspectives were included.

The workshops were structured to create a space that challenges norms and goes beyond surface-level discussions, aiming to uncover the root causes of systemic issues. They also aimed to encourage visionary thinking for future solutions. The workshops were four hours in length.

The workshops used the futuring framework, Three Horizons Framework, created by Bill Sharp ([International Futures Forum](#)).

The first Horizon (H1) represents the current way of doing things. H1 systems are the ones we rely on daily—such as banking, education, and government—to keep things functioning in the world we live in today. By participating in these systems, we help maintain and sustain them.

The third Horizon (H3) represents the future system. This horizon envisions new ways of living and working that will better meet emerging needs and opportunities - and in the case of the climate - urgent ones. H3 changes are transformative, introducing a new way of operating that goes beyond the limitations of H1.

The second Horizon (H2) is the transition zone between H1 and H3, where emerging innovations begin to respond to the shortcomings of H1 and anticipate the opportunities of H3. Some of these innovations, known as H2- (H2 negative), reinforce current systems, while others, known as H2+ (H2 positive), are aligned with the values of the future system in H3.

The framework is visualized as an X/Y graph, with TIME along the horizontal axis and PATTERN along the vertical axis. Time moves from left to right, while the pattern represents how we organize ourselves. The interplay of the three horizons shows the shift from the dominance of familiar systems (H1) to the emergence of new systems (H3), allowing us to take a multi-dimensional view of change.

Using the framework, we identified 8 questions to guide the work. The questions were heavily informed by the Video explanation of the framework by Kate Raworth².

Horizon 1: Where are we now?

- A. What are the primary characteristics of the linear business model?
- B. Looking back, how did we get here? What values, cultures, laws, economic systems, and events led to this?
- C. Who and what does the current system serve?
- D. Is there anything valuable about the linear system that should be preserved?

Horizon 2: How are we getting there?

- E. What are ways to bring about the changes envisioned in H3?
- F. What exists in the present that makes that future visible? Give examples?
- G. What will perpetuate what we have always done?

Horizon 3: Where are we going?

H. What does a circular future look like? What would it look like and feel like to be there? Get Specific.

The workshop was broken out into three parts.

1. Participants worked individually answering the questions on digital post-it notes
2. In small groups participants discussed their responses, aligning and organizing based on themes.
3. The larger group of 9 - 12 participants explored individual or group insights that came out of the breakout sessions.

All the answers captured digitally were exported and used for the analysis of the results below.

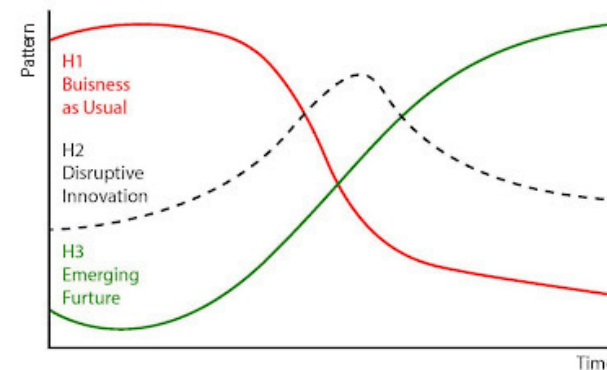


Figure 1

2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KfRQJgpPU> Kate Raworth

Participants

A diverse group of individuals were intentionally gathered with experience in the circular economy and/or apparel and textile industries, all of whom were committed to advancing a regenerative vision for the industry. Diversity in this context was defined by race, gender, industry roles, and levels of experience. We sought out people who were collaborative, passionate about circularity, and focused on finding solutions.

However, we recognize that this work is not comprehensive, and many voices were not included. Limitations such as language, time zones, and the exploratory nature of this project meant perspectives were missed. The workshops were conducted in English and included participants primarily from the Global North, including Canada, the USA, the UK, and Europe.

While there were participants who could speak to some of the experiences in the Global South, we did not hear directly from factory workers, farmers, secondary markets, and other key stakeholders. Future research could build on this foundation, extending the conversation to those additional communities.

We see this work as a starting point, not a conclusion. Future research can build on the foundation laid here, extending the workshops to more communities and adding even more diverse perspectives. As more voices join the conversation, this work will grow stronger, more inspiring, and more deeply grounded. The insights presented here are a direct result of the contributions from those who participated in these initial workshops.



Data Analysis

The process for delivering the results of this work is rooted in the research approach commonly known as participatory research³. This approach uses systematic inquiry in direct collaboration with those affected by an issue being studied for the purpose of action or change. The intention is to use the workshops as a way to surface critical knowledge that the industry can leverage and use to influence a more just and equitable circular economy.

All group sessions were recorded, transcribed verbatim and data documented (from a Miro board). The team took an inductive approach to cluster common themes in each horizon. Transcriptions of the group discussions helped contextualize individual reflections.

Each cohort engaged in deep conversations regarding the various interconnected issues within the current apparel system and expressed diverse aspirations for the future.

Dr. Sonali Diddi⁴ contributed her expertise in data analysis and was instrumental in drafting the results. A deductive thematic analysis, guided by the Three Horizons framework, was conducted to systematically explore the data. Through collaborative brainstorming sessions with key project members, efforts were made to ensure the results were unbiased, comprehensive, and aligned with the research objectives.

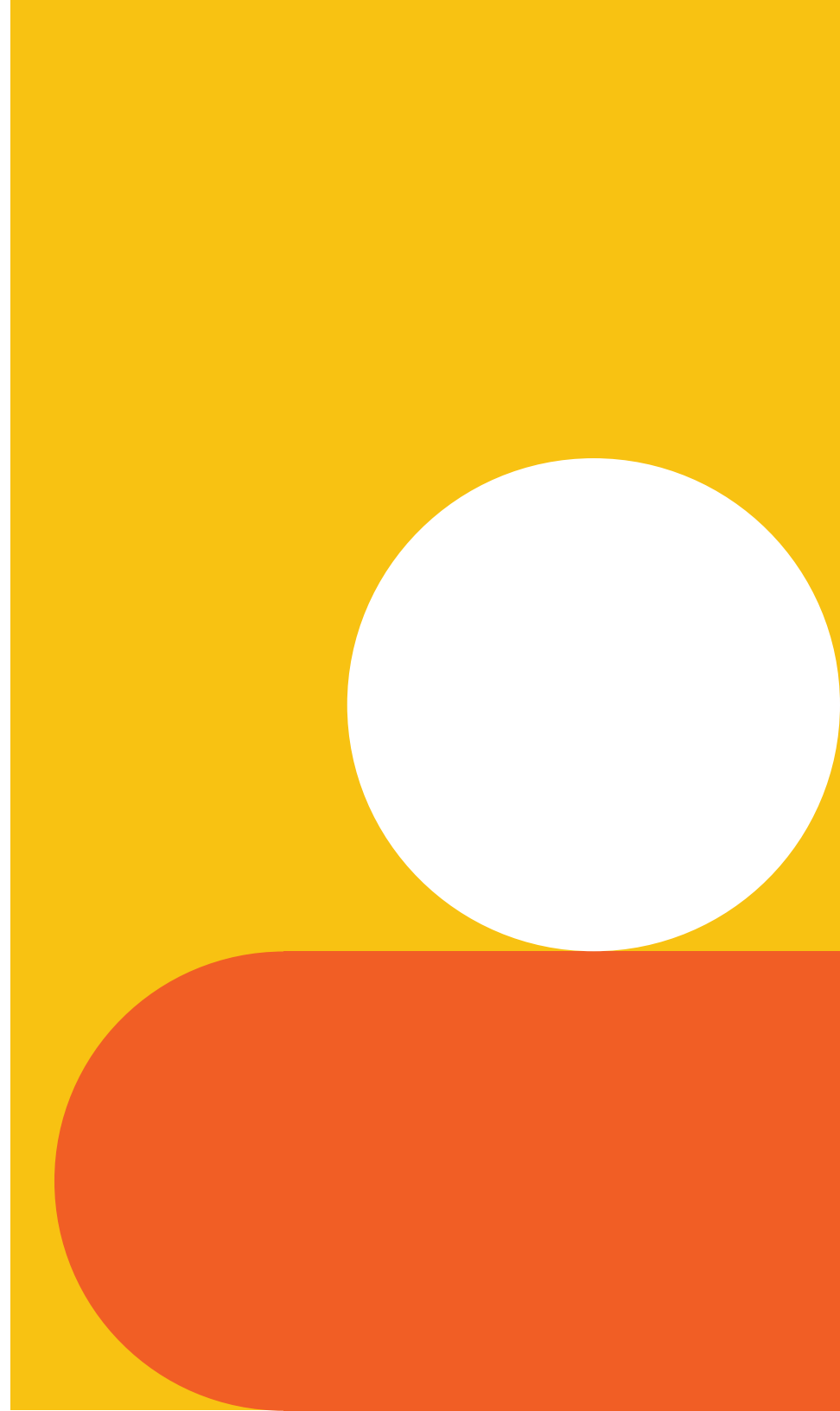
3. <https://jprm.scholasticahq.com/article/13244-participatory-research-methods-choice-points-in-the-research-process>

4. Associate Professor - Dept. of Design and Merchandising, CSU, Faculty Affiliate, CSU: School of Global Environmental Sustainability

Horizon 1

How We Live and Work Today

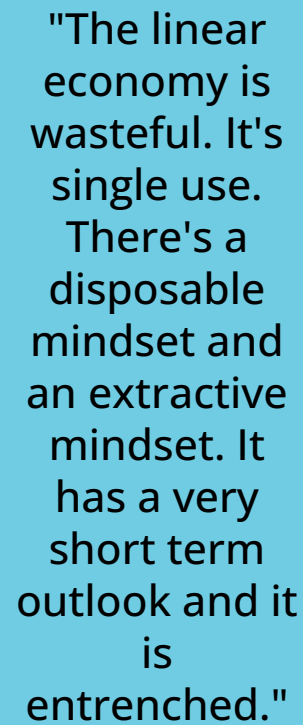
The Horizon 1 conversations were messy, nuanced, and incredibly important.



People came with different perspectives, languages, and ways of framing the challenges we face in linear systems. This allowed us to see the same problems from different angles — sometimes as different threads within the same pattern, other times as entirely new ways of interpreting what we thought we already understood.

By hearing and respecting all these perspectives, we were able to unearth an even more complex and nuanced understanding of the systems we're trying to change. Seeing the patterns together — and recognizing their intricate, interconnected impacts — gave us a sharper, more specific view of the forces shaping the industry and its failures.

The insights we surfaced may not seem groundbreaking at first glance. In many ways, these critiques are familiar: they've been shared for years in conversations about the linear economy. But here's the thing: they're familiar because the problems haven't changed.



"The linear economy is wasteful. It's single use. There's a disposable mindset and an extractive mindset. It has a very short term outlook and it is entrenched."

We cannot overstate how important it is to keep naming these problems. The industry is still exploiting people and the planet in service of commerce. The harm is accelerating the Climate Crisis, and no amount of talk about "sustainability or circularity" has stopped that. The critiques we discussed are as relevant and urgent now as they ever were because they remain unanswered.

This isn't just history repeating itself — it's proof that the most critical problems haven't been solved. They demand our attention until real change happens.

The following are the key themes that emerged:

- Brand Self-Interest
- Excessive and Disposable Consumer Culture
- Lack of Inclusive Systems Change Mindset
- Macro Societal Trends Driving the Current System

Horizon One Themes

BRAND SELF-INTEREST

Lack of responsibility and accountability of each stakeholder in the apparel supply chain was identified as one of the most important themes and one of the primary drivers of negative environmental and social impacts. Participants discussed several reasons why companies and brands have contributed to the wastefulness of the fashion industry. Participants across all groups agreed that the price of products does not reflect their true cost. This means the environmental and social impacts, or "externalities," such as pollution, resource depletion, and poor labor conditions, are not factored into the final price. As a result, the real costs of production are hidden, and the burden is shifted to the environment and society. Brand decisions are rooted in a capitalist structure, prioritizing sales, and economic gains over other considerations and consequences.

Further, the industry is siloed with minimal supply chain transparency and focused on driving demand of products that are made for planned obsolescence. Participants also shared that Key Performance Indicators of the majority of the brands excessively focus on financial goals often neglecting the societal purpose and value of their products.

Excessive focus on profit over the planet and people has driven the apparel industry to use cheap synthetic materials that are fossil fuel based with no consideration or plan for its responsible disposal.

EXCESSIVE AND DISPOSABLE CONSUMER CULTURE

Across cohorts, participants agreed that current apparel consumption is deeply rooted in a disposable mindset and patterns of wastefulness. While consumer desire for newness or convenience are drivers of this; it's not as simple as that. The system is shaped and perpetuated by brands.

Brands play a significant role in creating and reinforcing consumption behaviors. Through carefully crafted advertising, marketing, and sales strategies, they encourage a constant cycle of overconsumption and foster a cultural narrative where newness equals value. These strategies are designed to drive demand, meet sales targets, and achieve financial goals — often without providing consumers with the information needed to make thoughtful, sustainable choices.

Consumers have responsibility for their participation in the process but they are not entirely to blame for their behavior. They operate within a system that normalizes overconsumption while hiding its environmental and social costs. Additionally, the lack of transparency from brands about the impacts of production and disposal leaves consumers without the tools to make informed decisions. This system not only fuels wastefulness but also erodes emotional attachment to clothing, reducing garments to disposable commodities instead of valuable, long-lasting items.

In short, the current culture of overconsumption isn't just about consumer choices; it's about the powerful influence of an industry designed to prioritize profit over sustainability, often at the expense of people and the planet.

LACK OF INCLUSIVE SYSTEMS CHANGE MINDSET

A recurring theme across all cohort discussions was the dehumanizing, exploitative, and extractive nature of the apparel industry, which impacts stakeholders across the supply chain and disregards planetary boundaries. Participants broadly acknowledged that the current system is inequitable and driven by a dominant narrative rooted in a racist, colonialist, and capitalist worldview. This worldview perpetuates cultural hierarchies and supremacy, shaping decision-making and reinforcing inequality.

Not everyone used the same language, but across all groups, there was a shared recognition that the lack of inclusivity and the systemic disregard for Indigenous and traditional knowledge are critical issues that must be addressed. These gaps are not just remnants of a colonial past but active forces shaping the industry today. True systems change will require dismantling these hierarchies, valuing diverse perspectives, and integrating Indigenous knowledge into future solutions. Without these shifts, the industry will continue to perpetuate harm under the guise of progress.

MACRO SOCIETAL TRENDS DRIVING THE CURRENT SYSTEM

Societal trends that sustain the linear economy include population growth and a lack of civic engagement, where people are not actively involved in questioning or changing the system. Participants also noted that systems are largely driven by capitalism, which prioritizes profit and consumption. Reinforced by measuring economic progress by GDP (at the country level) and profits (and the company level). Additionally, there is a growing desire among people to fit into existing social and economic structures, along with a mindset that does not challenge the status quo. This combination of factors allows the linear economy, with its "take-make-dispose" model, to continue unchecked.

Other recurring themes across the groups included the role of globalization and the constant race to bottom to create a product as cheaply as possible.

Given the wasteful nature of the industry, numerous participants shared the lack of robust policies, specifically in Global North tackling waste and pollution in the supply chain. Prominent themes related to the linear fashion industry emerging across all cohorts were issues related to product quality and short product life cycles with little to no consideration to quality, and extended product use. The industrial revolution and innovations in manufacturing, technology and materials were other contributing factors to the current wasteful and disposable nature of the fashion industry.

With regards to the question related to who and what does the current system serve, there was an overwhelming consensus that the system primarily benefits those who control financial capital and profit from the existing structures. The linear apparel system thrives not just because consumers seek instant gratification, but because the system is designed to encourage this behavior. It traps consumers in a cycle of easily accessible, cheap products, fueling continuous consumption. Meanwhile, those who reap the financial rewards maintain their power and continue to benefit from the system's perpetuation.

HORIZON 1 CONCLUSION: WHAT TO LEAVE BEHIND, WHAT TO BRING FORWARD

Discussions about what to keep from the linear apparel system were deep and direct,

confronting the industry's flaws while identifying elements that could be reimaged to drive meaningful change. While there was broad agreement that much of the existing system is exploitative and needs to be left behind, participants also identified areas of potential value that could accelerate the circular transformation we envision.

The flaws of the current linear apparel system are undeniable. Participants highlighted its **exploitative, dehumanizing, and extractive practices**, driven by a mindset rooted in colonialism, capitalism, and systemic racism. The industry prioritizes profit over people and the planet, disregarding the value of Indigenous knowledge and sustainable practices that have been systematically replaced.

Key elements that must be left behind include:

- The **"take-make-waste" business model** that promotes overconsumption and wastefulness.
- The concentration of power and decision-making in the **Global North**, which sidelines diverse voices and perspectives.
- Practices that externalize environmental and social costs, disproportionately harming communities in the **Global South**.

These aspects of the linear system are incompatible with a circular future and must be dismantled to create a more equitable and sustainable industry.

While the need for systemic change is clear, participants also recognized that not everything in the current system is inherently flawed. Several elements of value were identified that could be adapted or reimaged to support a circular transformation.

Participants agreed that transforming the apparel industry is not about abandoning everything from Horizon 1 but about discerning what to leave behind and what to bring forward. The key is to adapt and reimagine the elements that can contribute to a circular future while dismantling the systems that perpetuate harm.

By selectively integrating the best of what exists with bold new approaches, we can accelerate the transition to a circular economy that values people, the planet, and the interconnected systems that sustain us.

INVESTMENTS TO BRING FORWARD

TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS

Emerging technologies are creating opportunities to scale sustainable practices. Advancements in material science, such as biodegradable fabrics and closed-loop recycling systems, offer viable solutions for reducing waste and improving resource efficiency. Technology also enables greater traceability and transparency, which are critical for building trust and accountability in the supply chain.

EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

The global supply chain, while flawed, represents a foundation that can be adapted for a circular future. Its scalability and accessibility have the potential to support localized economies while maintaining the benefits of global connectivity. By rethinking how supply chains operate — centering equity and sustainability — this infrastructure can serve as a bridge to more just practices.

CREATIVE AND ENTREPRENEURIAL ENERGY

The apparel industry has long been a hub for creativity and innovation. Participants emphasized the importance of preserving and supporting entrepreneurial thinking to drive new solutions. Circular systems will require imaginative approaches to design, production, and distribution, and the creative spirit of the industry can be harnessed to fuel these changes.

JOB CREATION POTENTIAL

The apparel sector provides millions of jobs worldwide. While many of these jobs are currently exploitative, the industry has the potential to create meaningful, equitable employment opportunities. A circular system could offer new roles in repair, recycling, and upcycling, providing dignified work that aligns with sustainable values.

Horizon 2

The Future We Choose to Build

The Horizon 3 discussions brought energy and optimism to the table, focusing on what a truly circular future could look and feel like.

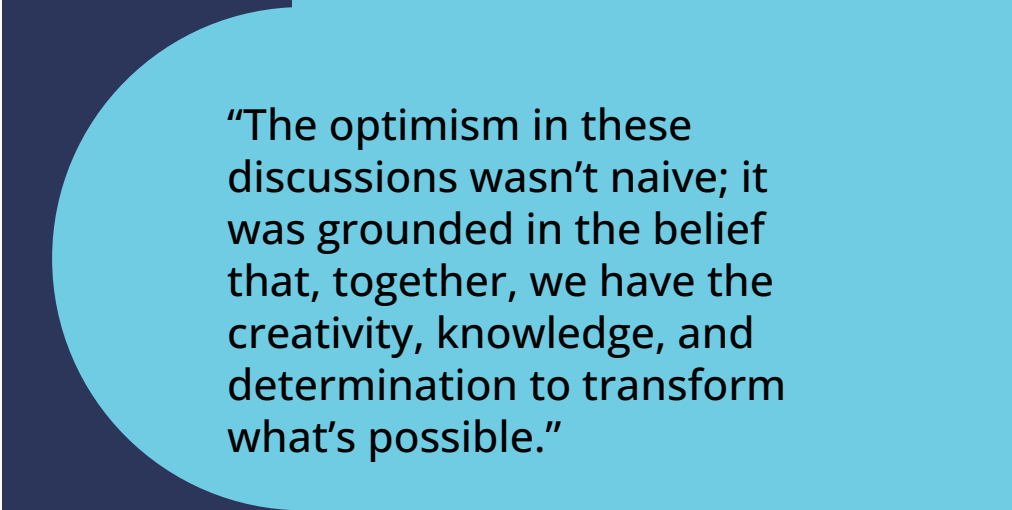


This isn't just a vision of environmental sustainability — it's a reimagined economic model where people, planet, and prosperity thrive together. It's a future where histories, values, and cultures expand to guide us toward systems that are equitable, inclusive, and just.

Participants leaned into the possibilities available when we choose a different path. This vision centers on flourishing ecosystems, thriving communities, and shared power across all stakeholders. Achieving this future requires key elements: transformative policies, adaptable infrastructure, cross-sector collaboration, and ongoing public education. These components are the building blocks of a system capable of creating meaningful, long-lasting change.

Across all workshops, the principles of diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion were identified as non-negotiable. Participants made it clear that a circular vision rooted in these values isn't optional — it's foundational. These principles guide decision-making, hold systems accountable, and ensure that the future we build serves everyone.

This is a future where environmental well-being thrives, where communities hold power and voice, and where justice and equity are the foundation of every decision. It's a future of bold possibilities, one where we actively choose to rewrite the rules of the game and build systems that work for everyone.



“The optimism in these discussions wasn't naive; it was grounded in the belief that, together, we have the creativity, knowledge, and determination to transform what's possible.”

Regenerative and Circular Practices

Participants discussed a vision for a sustainable and circular future in the apparel industry, characterized by several key principles and practices. In this envisioned future, materials would be biodegradable, and products would feature modular designs. These innovations would ensure that items can be easily disassembled and recycled, significantly reducing waste. The emphasis was on creating systems that extend the lifespan of materials and maximize resource use. Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring that every component is used to its fullest potential before being recycled or repurposed. This focus on keeping products and materials in use for as long as possible was seen as crucial for building a sustainable circular future.

Central to this vision was the idea of being connected, collaborative, and community-driven, fostering a shared sense of responsibility among all stakeholders. This interconnectedness was seen as essential for creating a system where resources are shared and used efficiently, promoting a collective effort toward circularity. A key element of this future also included a cross-functional, at time of need approach that prioritizes effectiveness, durability, and resource use that is non-extractive.

Another critical component of a circular apparel future is the emphasis on material and process innovations that foster a decoupling mindset. Decoupling refers to the industry's ability to create economic value without relying on the continuous production and consumption of physical goods. This shift redefines success, moving away from profit tied to resource extraction and toward a service-based economy where value comes from sustainable services like rental, repair, resale, and other innovative business models.

This decoupling also reimagines the role of consumers, treating them not as passive buyers but as active users and essential partners in the supply chain. By fostering circular practices such as product care, sharing, and repurposing, consumers become collaborators in a system designed to minimize waste and maximize utility.

Importantly, decoupling also involves separating production from profit maximization. Rather than prioritizing short-term financial gain, the industry would focus on building long-term sustainability and managing resources responsibly.

This means embracing production models that prioritize environmental health, equity, and innovation over sheer volume, creating a system where businesses thrive without exploiting people or the planet.

By adopting a decoupling mindset, the apparel industry can transform into a regenerative, service-driven system that fosters economic growth while protecting resources for future generations.

This approach aims to minimize environmental impact and promote a circular economy where resources are reused and regenerated. By integrating various functions and dynamically responding to demand, waste can be significantly reduced, ensuring that resources are utilized where they are needed most. This flexibility leads to more efficient production processes, further minimizing environmental impact.

CHANGING PRODUCTION AND USE BEHAVIORS

The envisioned future is one that is connected to nature, regenerative, and balanced. This means that rather than exploiting natural resources, the focus will be on minimal extraction and local or hyperlocal production. By sourcing materials and manufacturing goods closer to where they will be used, the industry can significantly reduce its environmental footprint, ultimately aiming for a carbon net positive status, where more carbon is sequestered than emitted.

This close connection to nature will in turn promote a harmonious coexistence where human activities support natural regeneration and sustainability.

Consumers will prioritize mindful consumption, understanding the impact of their choices and actively supporting sustainable practices while demanding greater transparency from companies. This cultural shift toward mindfulness is an essential part of the long-term circular future.

Repairing and reusing products will become the new social norm. Rather than discarding items, people will be encouraged—and in some cases required—to repair and reuse them. This shift will help foster a culture of circularity and resourcefulness, where individuals view their possessions as valuable resources rather than disposable items.

In this circular future, consumers will have what they need to make informed and responsible choices that significantly reduce waste and foster a vibrant, sustainable way of living. By embracing these practices, consumers will be active champions of a circular economy, contributing to a healthier planet through conscious and mindful consumption.

A JUST, INCLUSIVE, AND EQUITABLE FUTURE

The vision of a just, inclusive, and equitable circular future demands bold action and deep systemic change. This begins with social innovations that build a more adaptable, forward-thinking society. These innovations include educational models that emphasize critical thinking and foster community-driven initiatives grounded in empathy, empowerment, and self-determination. By promoting self-sufficiency and valuing people and products for their intrinsic worth rather than their market or social status, these innovations lay the groundwork for a society that prioritizes well-being and shared prosperity.

Central to this vision is the recognition of the dignity and potential of every individual. A circular future cannot be achieved without centering equity, valuing diversity, and ensuring that all voices are heard and respected in shaping the path forward.

HONORING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES

A holistic approach to sustainability and social justice must center and honor Indigenous wisdom. Indigenous cultures have long held deep connections to the land, fostering practices that promote ecological balance, community well-being, and intergenerational responsibility.

These practices, far from relics of the past, offer crucial insights into how to live in harmony with the Earth and with each other.

A circular future reintegrates this wisdom into leadership, governance, and decision-making processes. This is not about appropriating or romanticizing Indigenous practices but about creating space for Indigenous leadership and voices, acknowledging the harm caused by colonial systems that devalued these practices, and restoring their rightful place in building a sustainable and just future.

POLICY AND INFRASTRUCTURE FOR CIRCULARITY

Equally critical are the policy and infrastructure innovations needed to support and scale circular systems. Participants emphasized the importance of policies that reward transparency, traceability, and extended material use, creating conditions where circular practices are the norm, not the exception. Such policies would hold companies accountable and establish industry standards that make circularity a requirement.

Infrastructure must also evolve to support these policies, enabling systems for repair, recycling, and material reuse to thrive. These changes ensure that circularity becomes embedded in the everyday operations of businesses, communities, and governments alike.

RESTORING HARMONY

This future is about more than just reshaping the industry — it's about restoring harmony with nature and with one another. By combining new social innovations, the wisdom of Indigenous practices, and policies that institutionalize circularity, we can create a future that values equity, justice, and the interconnectedness of all life. This is the path to a circular world that works for everyone, honoring the dignity of people, the resilience of the planet, and the shared responsibility we hold to create a better tomorrow.

HORIZON 3 CONCLUSION: CONNECTION, REGENERATION, AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The Horizon 3 discussions outlined a bold and inspiring vision for a circular future — one grounded in connection, regeneration, and shared responsibility. This isn't just a theoretical concept; it's a practical and achievable future where the apparel industry can succeed while respecting people and the planet.

This future is characterized by systems that extend the life of materials, processes that decouple profit from resource extraction, and innovations that prioritize equity, justice, and sustainability.

It's a future where biodegradable materials, modular designs, and circular production methods are the norm, and where the value of every resource is maximized. Participants envisioned a world where repair and reuse replace disposability, where hyperlocal production minimizes environmental impact, and where businesses succeed by offering meaningful services rather than endless goods.

Central to this vision is a shift in cultural mindset. Consumers are no longer passive participants but active collaborators in the circular economy. With access to transparent information and sustainable systems, they are empowered to make choices that reflect their values and contribute to a healthier planet.

The future also honors the wisdom of Indigenous cultures, integrating their deep connections to the land and practices of ecological balance into leadership and decision-making. This is a future that recognizes the dignity and potential of every individual and rebalances power to create systems that are inclusive, equitable, and just.

"It's useful for creating visions that we can build against. And when we fail to engage in that process, we fall short of our hopes because you are already cutting yourself off from that greatest possibility. If we dream HERE, we will get to HERE."

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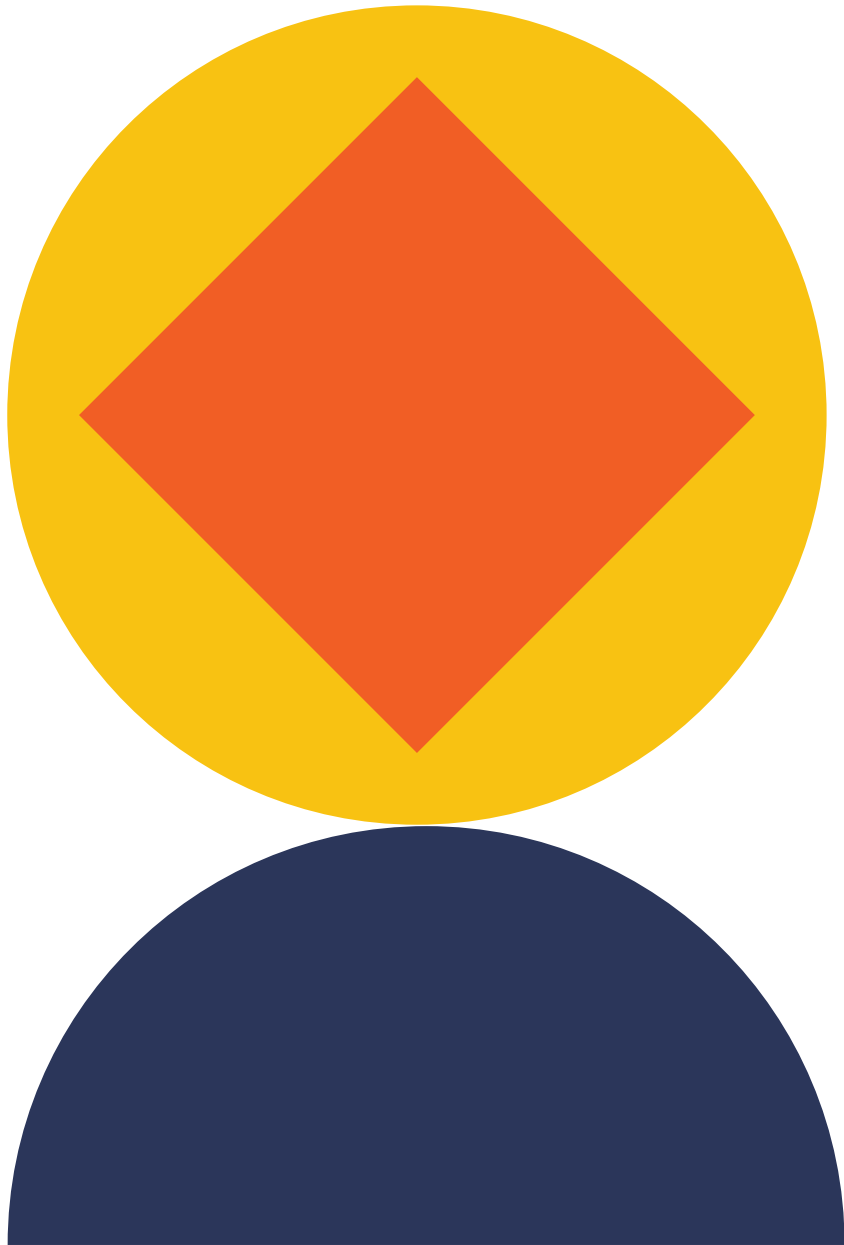
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A FUTURE BUILT ON POSSIBILITY

This circular vision requires more than technological or policy changes; it demands that we reimagine what's possible. Participants emphasized that with transformative policies, adaptive infrastructure, cross-sector collaboration, and public education, we can create an apparel industry that regenerates rather than depletes.

It's a future where environmental well-being thrives alongside flourishing communities, where businesses innovate not just for profit but for purpose, and where justice and equity are the foundation of every decision. By choosing to embrace this vision, we can rewrite the rules of the industry and build systems that honor both people and the planet.

The energy in these discussions wasn't just optimism; it was a belief in our collective ability to create real change. Together, we have the tools, creativity, and determination to transform what's possible — and that transformation begins now.



Horizon 2

The Messy Middle

Discussions related to Horizon 2 focused on how to bring about the changes envisioned in Horizon 3.

Some current interventions can help us achieve this future, while certain aspects of the existing system may perpetuate outdated practices.

It's important to note that while the themes in Horizon 2 may seem similar to those in Horizon 3, they represent what currently exists and could potentially transform into Horizon 3. However, not all elements are created equal. The goal is to ensure that innovation does not merely extend today's linear system but instead transforms it to make Horizon 3 possible.

In the Three Horizons framework, a theme that continues the status quo—characterized by exploitation, extraction, and siloed practices—is labeled as H2 Negative. Conversely, a theme that promotes transformation—focusing on inclusivity, regeneration, and changing behaviors—is classified as H2 Positive.

To create a sustainable and equitable future, we must apply the lens of H2 Positive to today's existing work, ensuring that we invest in efforts that align with our H3 Circular Vision.

The themes highlighted include redefining success metrics, fostering cross-sector partnerships, implementing comprehensive policy reforms, and embracing both traditional and innovative practices. By integrating these diverse approaches, we can build a resilient, just, and sustainable apparel industry.

REDEFINING SUCCESS METRICS

Achieving a sustainable, circular, and equitable future requires a fundamental shift in how success is measured and valued. Participants emphasized that traditional metrics focused solely on economic growth and profit are inadequate for addressing the complex challenges the industry faces. Instead, these must be replaced or supplemented with new indicators that measure social equity, environmental impact, resource efficiency, and long-term well-being for both people and the planet.

In addition to these new metrics, participants highlighted the critical need for business models that prioritize circular services such as rental, repair, resale, and recycling. These models offer alternatives to the "take-make-waste" approach, enabling companies to generate financial value while reducing dependency on resource extraction and material waste. Circular services not only foster sustainable practices but also create opportunities for deeper engagement with consumers, turning them into active participants in the circular economy.

Some apparel companies have begun experimenting with alternative success indicators and innovative business models, but these are too often relegated to pilot projects and widespread adoption and accountability remain limited. New financial metrics that reflect the true costs and benefits of circularity — such as carbon reduction, material reuse rates, and social impact measurements — are essential for scaling these efforts. These metrics should drive investment, influence policy, and serve as benchmarks for meaningful progress.

The introduction of digital product passports is another promising development. These tools enable full lifecycle tracking of garments, enhancing transparency and accountability across supply chains. Digital passports empower consumers to make informed, responsible choices while helping companies optimize resource management and extend product lifecycles.

Ultimately, redefining success through these ***new metrics and models*** isn't just a technical fix — it's a necessary transformation of the apparel industry's values and practices. By prioritizing circular services, embracing transparency, and measuring what truly matters, the industry can shift toward a future that values both profitability and sustainability in equal measure.

FOSTERING CROSS SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

New forms of collaboration have emerged, fostering partnerships among the public, private, and philanthropic sectors that leverage diverse resources and expertise to drive systemic change. These partnerships are diverse in their structures, some support technological solutions, others include tackling comprehensive systems approaches, others are integrating technological advancements with improvements in physical infrastructure.

There has been a growing recognition of the importance of traditional practices in managing resources sustainably, which respect both people and the planet. Additionally, education and advocacy are playing pivotal roles in shifting societal norms and behaviors. Awareness campaigns advocating for sustainable practices are increasing, fostering a culture that values long-term ecological health and social justice.

MOVING BEYOND PILOTS

A recurring theme in the discussions was the apparel industry's reliance on Horizon 2 negative practices, particularly the use of pilot programs to test circular initiatives.

While pilots are often framed as progressive steps, participants expressed concerns that they rarely lead to the systemic change required for a truly circular future. Instead, they tend to remain isolated experiments, failing to evolve into fully integrated circular business models.

Pilots often function as temporary solutions, allowing companies to test concepts without committing to widespread adoption. They are used to generate press coverage or meet short-term sustainability goals without addressing the deeper structural changes needed to transform the industry. This stagnation keeps circularity on the periphery, preventing it from becoming a core part of business strategy.

MOVING RESALE FROM TACTIC TO STRATEGY

Resale has emerged as one of the most visible efforts in the apparel industry's move toward circularity, offering consumers a way to extend the life of garments while reducing waste. However, participants emphasized that resale remains largely a tactic, rather than a fully integrated strategy. Companies often treat resale as a marketing tool or a siloed initiative, failing to align it with broader efforts to embed circularity into their business models.

Currently, many companies treat resale as an add-on, running programs through external partnerships or pilot platforms that remain disconnected from the main business. This fragmented approach prevents resale from influencing critical areas like design, manufacturing, and pricing strategies, limiting its potential impact.

Additionally, resale is often marketed as a sustainability initiative, but without the infrastructure to scale it meaningfully, it remains more of a public relations tool than a driver of systemic change. Many brands promote their resale efforts to signal environmental responsibility while failing to address the structural changes needed to make resale a central part of their operations.

Perhaps most significantly, resale as it is currently practiced does little to confront the industry's overproduction problem. While extending the life of garments is important, it does not address the root cause of waste and environmental harm: the sheer volume of products being made. For resale to drive real transformation, it must go beyond mitigating the symptoms of the linear system and begin challenging its most harmful practices.

When integrated into supply chain planning, design processes, and pricing strategies, resale can fundamentally change how products are conceived and managed, making them easier to resell, repair, and recycle.

This integration ensures that resale isn't a standalone effort but a vital part of the business model, aligned with long-term sustainability goals. Designing for circularity ensures that each item contributes to a system where resources are maximized and environmental impact is reduced.

When implemented strategically, resale programs deepen customer loyalty by fostering ongoing engagement and encouraging repeat interactions, strengthening the bond between consumers and brands. They also open new revenue streams by monetizing existing products multiple times, reducing the industry's reliance on constant new production. Additionally, by extending the lifecycle of garments, resale significantly reduces resource dependency, aligning with the broader goal of decoupling growth from resource extraction and minimizing environmental impact.

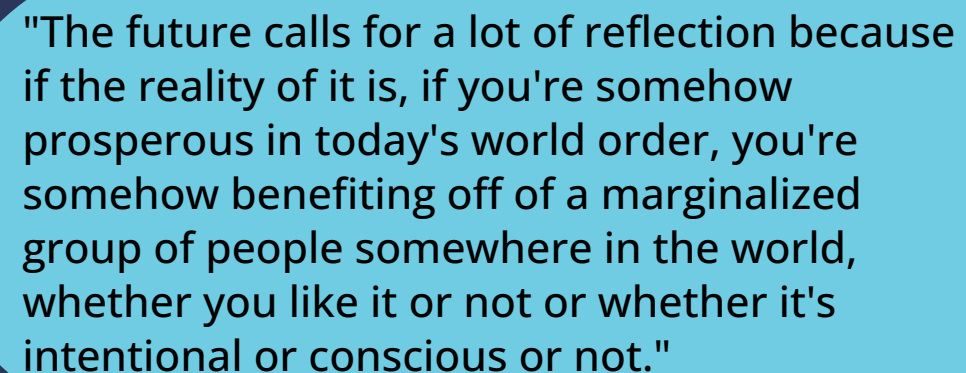
HORIZON 2 CONCLUSION: THE MESSY MIDDLE TOWARDS CHANGE

The discussions around Horizon 2 highlighted both the challenges and opportunities of this transitional phase, what we refer to as the "messy middle." This is the space where the aspirations of Horizon 3 must contend with the entrenched practices of Horizon 1, and where the decisions made today will determine the trajectory of the apparel industry.

While some current practices and innovations show promise, participants emphasized that Horizon 2 must not become a holding pattern that delays or dilutes the systemic change required for a circular future.

To bridge the gap, participants called for a shift from incremental interventions to transformative strategies. Redefining success metrics, for instance, offers a way to embed values like social equity, environmental responsibility, and long-term well-being into how the industry measures progress. Similarly, cross-sector partnerships and collaborations—spanning public, private, and philanthropic efforts—demonstrate the potential for diverse stakeholders to pool resources and expertise to tackle systemic challenges in innovative ways.

However, the limitations of Horizon 2 practices, such as reliance on pilot programs and treating circular initiatives like resale as add-ons, were clear.



"The future calls for a lot of reflection because if the reality of it is, if you're somehow prosperous in today's world order, you're somehow benefiting off of a marginalized group of people somewhere in the world, whether you like it or not or whether it's intentional or conscious or not."

Pilots and fragmented efforts often fail to deliver meaningful change because they operate at the periphery rather than at the heart of business models. Moving resale and other circular services from tactical efforts to core business models is essential to ensuring circularity becomes the driving operating principle, rather than a sustainability footnote.

Ultimately, Horizon 2 represents a critical juncture. It is a space to test and refine ideas, but more importantly, it is a space to lay the groundwork for transformation.

By applying the lens of H2 Positive—embracing inclusivity, regeneration, and systemic change—the apparel industry can use this phase to build momentum toward the just, circular, and sustainable future envisioned in Horizon 3. The path forward requires bold commitments, innovative thinking, and unwavering focus on long-term goals. Horizon 2 is not the destination, but it is the bridge—and it must be built with care, intention, and urgency.

TAKING THE VISION FORWARD OR FORWARDING THE VISION

Thank you for taking the time to engage with this work and for stepping into the questions and complexities it raises. This process has been about more than just findings—it's been about people coming together, sharing their perspectives,

and wrestling with the difficult but necessary questions of how we build a circular future together. This process, at its core, is about bringing people together, holding space for diverse perspectives, and honestly grappling with the path forward. To the participants who brought their honesty, vulnerability, and unwavering dedication: thank you. Your voices have shaped this work in profound ways.

As we said in the beginning, the process matters as much as the outcomes. This work isn't about perfect answers or easy solutions. It's in the act of gathering, listening, and challenging each other that the seeds of transformation are planted. The questions and frameworks here are meant to be used—by you, by your communities, and by others ready to explore what's possible. Take them, convene your own diverse groups, and dive into the challenges and opportunities of creating a vision for the circular future that our world requires.

The real vision is Horizon 3: a future rooted in connection, regeneration, and shared responsibility. Everything else—every pilot, every metric, every strategy—is about whether we choose to get there or we don't. This process was five groups of people, struggling together with these questions, finding insight and hope in the complexity. Now, it's an invitation for you to do the same. The work ahead isn't easy, but the possibilities are real—and they are worth it. Let's keep moving toward the future we know we can build, together.



Thank you!

We're grateful for your engagement with this work. We encourage you to connect with our contributors and support their work in advancing a Regenerative and Circular economy.

We also invite you to apply this framework to create your own conversations. Together, we can shape the future we want to see.

For more information or to continue the conversation, please visit us at citruscircular.com.

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