

Circularity Maturity Assessment:

Positioning East and Southern Africa for Competitive Advantage

This factsheet presents a maturity assessment of 13 East and Southern African countries across five key dimensions of circular economy readiness, identifying their progress and priority areas for advancing the transition to circularity.

The Case for Circular Economies in Africa

A circular economy keeps resources in use for as long as possible, extracting maximum value before they're returned to the environment—eliminating waste and pollution by design, rather than simply recycling. For Africa's developing economies, circular approaches offer pathways to leapfrog linear consumption patterns while creating local jobs and protecting valuable natural resources. The African Union launched the Continental Circular Economy Action Plan for Africa (2024-2034) in 2025, which aims to steer the continent toward cleaner, more competitive development pathways.

About SWITCH-2-CE in ESA: A Regional Multi-Country Transition Programme

SWITCH to Circular Economy in East and Southern Africa (SWITCH-2-CE in ESA) fosters an inclusive transition to a circular economy (CE) by working to enable policy frameworks, develop skilled workers, support SME participation, and improve financing mechanisms for circular businesses.

The programme targets two priority waste streams, electronic and electrical waste (e-waste) and plastic packaging, across 13 African countries in East and Southern Africa.

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The Five Dimensions of Circularity Maturity

Circularity is complex because it requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, involving coordination across public sector departments and the private sector. To assess circular economy maturity, five dimensions based on 24 indicators were investigated through an initial mapping study.

Primary and secondary data were captured to create high accuracy. Gaps in data are prevalent across countries especially on material flows and specific value-chain data for e-waste and plastic packaging. Therefore, these country groupings should be understood as relative assessments based on available data, not definitive measures. The five dimensions examined are:

Policy Framework

Mapping the CE policy landscape including policy outputs, regulatory frameworks, coordination mechanisms between public and private stakeholders

Institutions & Stakeholders

Mapping of key stakeholders (public, private and civil society) actively engaged in CE-related processes

Labour Market

Understanding the current labour landscape of plastic packaging and e-waste, particularly the role of informal workers

Material Flows, Data and Monitoring

Identifying key relevant CE national monitoring systems, including data on the full life cycle of the two targeted value chains

Infrastructure, Investment and Business Models

Identifying key infrastructure such as waste management facilities, logistics capacity, repair and reuse centres (formal and informal), investment flowing into these, and the existence of circular business cases

Regional Landscape: Understanding Each Country's Readiness

Based on the country assessments, three relative maturity levels emerged across the five dimensions:

Front Runners



Countries characterised by relatively advanced policy frameworks, broad and coordinated stakeholder ecosystems, emerging (though uneven) data and monitoring systems, significant infrastructure and business model innovation, and early labour market integration including informal actors.

Intermediates



Countries with partial or developing policies, moderately diverse stakeholder networks, limited and fragmented data, pilot-level infrastructure and investments. Labour markets still dominated by informal activity, though with emerging training and integration efforts.

Starters



Countries where circularity is primarily framed through basic waste policies, with small and poorly connected stakeholder groups, weak or entirely absent data systems, minimal infrastructure and a very weak business ecosystem, and highly informal, under-recognised labour markets.

These dimensions are relative rankings, not absolute standards. A country isn't assessed against a fixed global benchmark but assessed in comparison to the other countries being evaluated. This grouping highlights both **relative strengths** and **priority areas for development**. A country may be a Front Runner in one dimension but a **Starter** in another.

SWITCH to Circular Economy in East and Southern Africa (SWITCH-2-CE in ESA) Programme

Fostering an inclusive transition to a circular economy

The below map can be viewed as a snapshot because the different dimensions are ever evolving per country. The map is based on research conducted by Circle Economy Foundation and the African Circular Economy Network from April to December 2025.

These differentiated profiles enable tailored policy interventions and support mechanisms, ensuring that each country's unique strengths become the foundation for advancing circularity where gaps exist.

Key

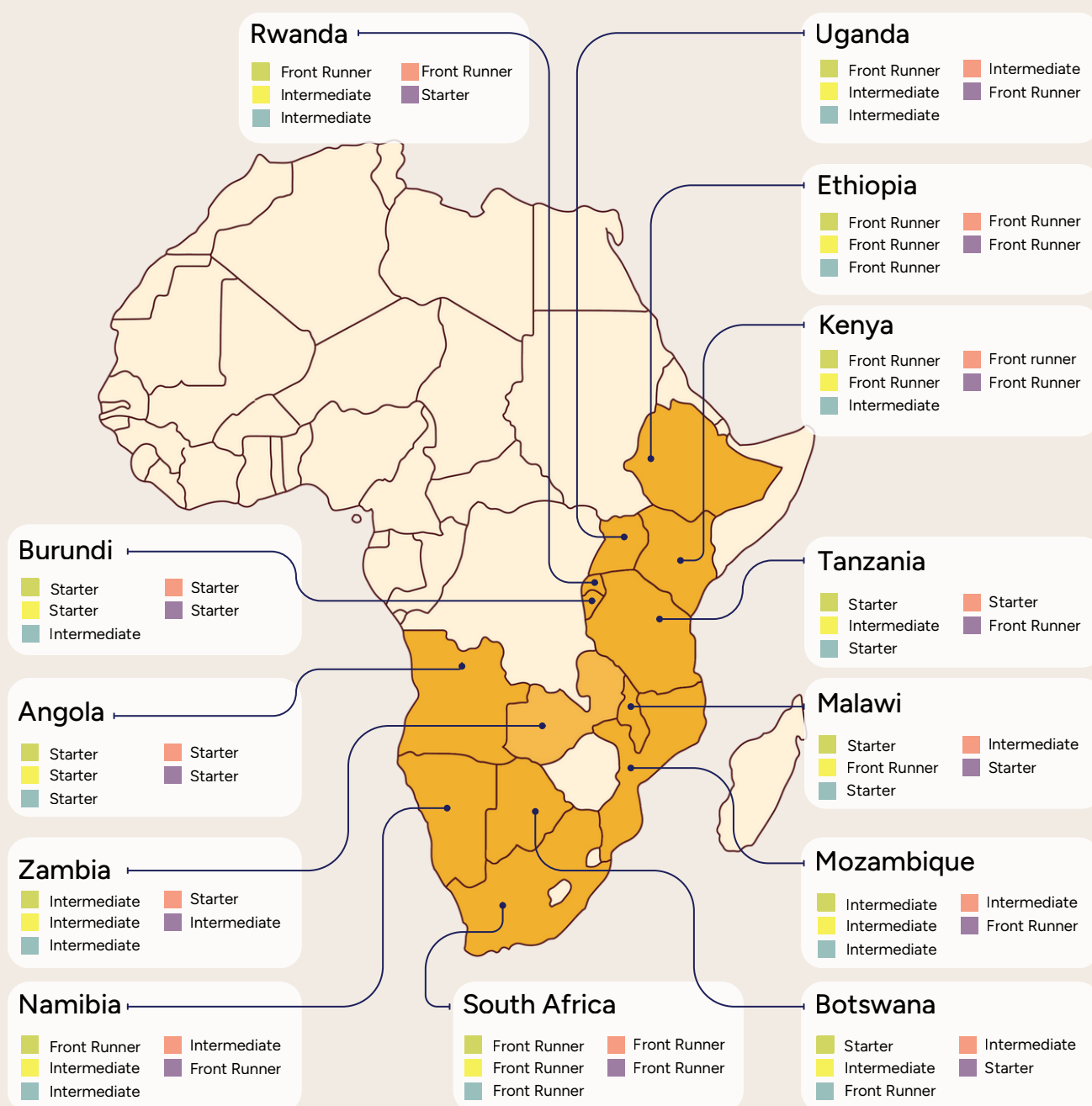
Policy Framework

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