



**International
Society of Waste
Management,
Air and Water**



**International
Partnership for
Expanding Waste
Management
Services of Local
Authorities**



12th September 2025

The 15th IconSWM-CE & IPLA GF 2025

A Special Session on

**The Circular Economy in South Asia: Regional
Progress and the Role of Informal Waste Sector
in a Just Transition**

October 30, 2025

2:25 – 4:20 PM India Standard Time

(5:55 – 7:50 PM Japan Standard Time)

Graphic Era University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India

CONCEPT NOTE & AGENDA

Date: 30th October 2025, 2:25 – 4:20 IST (5:55 -7:50 PM JST)

Venue: Hybrid (Graphic Era University and Zoom)

a) Background

South Asia is one of the world's most dynamic and rapidly developing regions. This economic growth, coupled with a significant population, has led to increased resource consumption, waste generation, and environmental stress. Traditional linear "take-make-dispose" economic models are proving unsustainable, contributing to resource depletion, plastic pollution, and significant carbon emissions. In response to these pressing challenges, the concept of a Circular Economy (CE) is gaining considerable momentum across the region.

The Circular Economy offers a systemic solution framework aimed at decoupling economic growth from resource consumption. By designing out waste and pollution, keeping products and materials in use, and regenerating natural systems, the CE model presents a pathway towards sustainable development. Nations across South Asia have begun to recognize this potential, with varying degrees of progress in policy development, private sector innovation, and civil society engagement. Initiatives ranging from national-level waste management regulations and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) frameworks in India to community-led recycling projects in other South Asian countries highlight the diverse approaches being adopted. In parallel, the actors vary from the national level to the grass-root level are actively working towards circularity through their actions from developing policies to community led-awareness.

The informal sector is playing a crucial role in developing countries in Asia as enablers of the circular economy by extracting materials from waste streams and diverting it into recycling value chain. Crucially, the current resource recovery landscape in South Asia is underpinned by a vast and active informal sector. These waste pickers and aggregators form the backbone of collection, sorting, and recycling for a significant volume of materials, representing a pre-existing, albeit marginalized, circular system. A primary challenge, therefore, is not just establishing new circular models but also recognizing, formalizing, and ensuring a just transition for this vital workforce. This involves addressing issues of social security, safe working conditions,

and fair value capture as the region moves towards a more structured Circular Economy. Global developments, such as the UNEA Plastic Treaty negotiations and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12 on sustainable consumption and production, increasingly highlight the importance of recognising informal workers. Transforming waste management systems into socially inclusive circular economies requires formal integration of these workers through co-designed strategies that build capacity, enable economic empowerment, and protect human rights.

This special session is designed to create a focused platform for stakeholders to share insights, benchmark progress, and discuss among all stakeholders in public, private, academic and the informal sectors that are important to inclusive and equitable waste system.

b) Objectives of the Special Session

The primary goal of this special session is to provide a comprehensive snapshot of the current state of the Circular Economy in South Asia, highlighting key advancements, persistent challenges, involvement of the informal sector, and future opportunities.

Specifically, this session aims to:

- Present a high-level overview of the Circular Economy landscape in the South Asian region, identifying common drivers and barriers.
- Showcase country-specific progress and successful case/sectoral studies from selected countries in South Asia.
- Examine the critical role of the informal waste sector and discuss strategies for its recognition, integration, and empowerment within a just transition to a circular economy.
- Highlight field-based evidence from Asian countries on the contributions, challenges, and potential of the informal waste sector in the circular economy.
- Identify common challenges and shared opportunities for cross-border collaboration in areas such as policy harmonization, regional platform, knowledge products
- Promote dialogue and networking among policymakers, researchers, industry leaders, and civil society to catalyze collective action towards a more circular South Asia.

c) About the Special Session

A special session, "The Circular Economy in South Asia: Regional Progress and the Role of Informal Workers in a Just Transition," will be held at the 15th IconSWM-CE & IPLA GF 2025. This session provides a concise yet comprehensive overview of the circular economy (CE) transition across the region.

The 110-minute session will tackle the two topics:

1. **Status of the CE in South Asia:** This part begins with a regional analysis, followed by focused presentations on the progress and specific contexts within selected South Asian countries.
2. **Informal Waste Workers as Enablers of a Just and Inclusive Circular Economy:** The second part will explore the vital role of informal workers as enablers of a just and inclusive circular economy.

This session is designed for a diverse group of stakeholders from academia, government, the private sector, and civil society, including, but not limited to:

- National and local policymakers
- Representatives from waste picker associations and cooperatives
- Circular economy and waste management professionals
- Academics and researchers
- Staff from development agencies (e.g., UNEP, UN-Habitat, UNDP, GIZ)
- Members of NGOs and grassroots organizations

The detailed program schedule is outlined in the table below.

AGENDA:

Session	Time (IST)	Agenda
Part 1: The Circular Economy in South Asia: a review of regional progress <i>Moderated by: <to be confirmed></i>	2:25 – 2:30 PM	Welcome Remarks
		Session Framing for Regional 3R Framework in South Asia <i>Presented by: Mr. Choudhury Rudra Charan Mohanty, UNCRD</i>
	2:30 – 2:40 PM	The Circular Economy in South Asia: An Overview of Progress and Regional Trends <i>Presented by: Mr. Ezra Osorio, IGES</i>
	2:40 – 2:45 PM	Discussion / Q&A
Part 2: The Role of Informal Workers in a Just Transition <i>Moderated by: Dr. Shilpi Bakshi, Environmental Management Centre Pvt Ltd</i>	2:45 – 2:55 PM	Country Presentation #1: Development and Implementation of the National Circular Economy Plan in India <i>Presented by: Dr. Shilpi Bakshi, Senior Vice President, Environmental Management Centre Pvt Ltd</i>
	2:55 – 3:05 PM	Country Presentation #2: <Case Study or a Sectoral Presentation regarding CE in Maldives> <i>Presented by: Mr. Gordon Jackson, Soneva Namoonna Champion, Soneva Namoonna</i>
	3:05 – 3:20 PM	Interactive Panel Discussion and Way Forward to the Next Part of the Session
	3:20 – 3:35 PM	Framing Presentation for the Informal Waste Sector <i>Presented by: Ms. Bharati Chaturvedi, Director, Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group</i>
	3:35 – 3:40 PM	Presentation: Key Findings and Case Studies from Asia <i>Presented by: Mr. Lakshitha Paranagamage, IGES</i>

Session	Time (IST)	Agenda
	3:40 – 4:10 PM	<p>Panel Discussion: Pathways for Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Bharati Chaturvedi, Director, Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group • Dr. Ayesha Khan, CEO, Akhter Hameed Khan Foundation, Pakistan • Ms. Junko Fujioka, Program Assistant, International Environmental Technology Centre, Chemicals and Health Branch, Industry and Economy Division, UNEP-IETC • Ms. Chinmayi MN, Executive Director, Hasiru Dala • Indumathi
	4:10 – 4:15 PM	<p>Audience Engagement: Roundtable Input & Q&A</p>
	4:15 – 4:20 PM	<p>Summary of Key Takeaways</p>
		<p>Closing of the Session</p>