

WORLD CIRCULAR ECONOMY FORUM 2026
18 SEPT 2026
ACCELERATOR SESSION



an initiative by
Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser
to the Government of India
Science and Technology Cluster

World Circular Economy Forum 2026 Accelerator Session

Roundtable Discussion on From Pilot to Policy: Co-designing the Startup-ULB Pathway for Circular Cities

Circular startups have solutions; cities have the waste and the mandate, yet partnerships stay fragile and champion-dependent. Work alongside ULB leaders, founders and financiers to design a repeatable pathway from pilot to scale, grounded in live Bengaluru examples.

Organised by

1. Environmental Management and Policy Research Institute, Government of Karnataka.
(<https://empri.karnataka.gov.in/en>)
2. Bengaluru Science and Technology Cluster; an initiative of the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India. (www.bestkc.in)

Supported by

Karnataka State Pollution Control Board

Date	18 September 2026
Time	10:30 – 12:30 IST (UTC +5:30)
Duration	2 hours
Format	Roundtable discussion in person in Bengaluru, with online participation across India
Venue	Indian Institute of Science Bengaluru
Audience	Policymakers, ULB / public officials, Startups, business leaders, practitioners, financiers & investors, CSR, researchers, academicians, NGOs, think tanks, Incubators & Accelerators
SDGs	8, 9, 11, 12, 17

About the Event

The World Circular Economy Forum (WCEF) (wcef2026.com) is the world's leading annual event on the circular economy, organised by the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra together with international partners. In its 10th edition, WCEF2026 will be held in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India, from 15–18 September 2026, jointly organised by Sitra and the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), with support from India's Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and the Government of Gujarat. The main forum (15–16 September) brings together global leaders from business, government, academia and civil society across four plenaries and sixteen parallel sessions. On 17–18 September, a series of Accelerator Sessions is hosted by collaborating organisations in person or online in India, and around the world.

About This Session

EMPRI–BeST is hosting an Accelerator Session as part of WCEF2026, focused on turning promising circular-economy pilots into repeatable, scalable partnerships between cities' Urban Local Bodies and Startups.

India has no shortage of circular economy startups, and no shortage of willing Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), yet startup–ULB collaborations remain bespoke, fragile and champion-dependent. ULBs own the problem and the material; startups own the solutions and the speed; circular cities require an institutional bridge between the two and that bridge doesn't yet reliably exist. This workshop convenes ULB leaders, startup founders, financiers and researchers to co-create a stage-gated Startup–ULB Partnership Framework: a shared pathway from discovery through pilot, validation, procurement and scale. Key questions: How can we pilot the integration of multiple startup solutions with ULBs across the entire value chain, from collection to end-of-life of various waste streams, to achieve net zero circularity? How can ULBs procure innovation within existing rules? How should risk, payment and asset ownership be allocated at each stage? What measurement protocols let a pilot earn a contract? How can one city's success replicate across a state's ULBs? Cities worldwide struggle to absorb circular innovation; a framework tested in India's urban contexts offers a transferable tool for the Global South. We bring live Bengaluru examples presented jointly by founders and enabling officials.

This session operationalises WCEF2026's core proposition - making the circular economy a practical economic strategy at the city level where India's transition will be decided. It cuts across all four tracks of WCEF 2026.

Governance: participants co-design the partnership pathways, risk allocation and measurement gates which will let ULBs absorb circular innovations.

Business: startups gain a repeatable route from pilot to contract, transforming urban waste value chains.

Growth: a framework designed for replication across a state's ULBs turns isolated successes into scale.

People: cleaner healthier resilient sustainable cities, communities and people.

The hosts bring deep practice: BeST Cluster convenes Bengaluru's Circular Economy Stakeholders; EMPRI, a Government of Karnataka institute, has more than two decades of applied and policy research and capacity building trainings on concurrent environmental issues, and encourage and enable government, industry and civil society to safeguard and manage the natural resources effectively. The session will return a whitepaper on the partnership framework.

The session advances all five goals of WCEF2026 through practice, not just discussion. (1) It demonstrates viability in municipal budgets and startup business models, circular partnerships delivering better services, inclusive jobs and transitions (2) It is matchmaking by design: curated ULB officials, startup founders, financiers and enable partnerships that outlive the forum. (3) It builds India's capabilities directly: a published whitepaper on Startup–ULB Partnership Framework with model clauses and measurement protocols, made openly available. (4) By diverting urban waste from landfills into productive value chains, the framework advances material resilience, climate and biodiversity goals. (5) The format embodies participatory discovery where everyone in the room shares and co-designs building a cross-sectoral coalition, with knowledge sharing from international participants.

Tentative Agenda

Time	Session Item	Speaker(s)
10:30 – 10:35	Welcome	Host — EMPRI–BeST
10:35 – 10:45	Context: why this session, why now	Moderator
10:45 – 10:55	Introductions	All speakers
10:55 – 11:10	Keynote: The scale challenge — why city–startup partnerships stall	Keynote speaker — Senior government official

Time	Session Item	Speaker(s)
11:10 – 12:05	Roundtable: From pilot to policy — what a repeatable partnership needs Co-designing a repeatable pathway (based on Bengaluru case examples)	Moderated Discussion — ULB leader, circular-economy startup founder, financier/investor, policy official
12:05 – 12:25	Reflections & Suggestions from the audience	Roundtable + audience
12:25 – 12:30	Closing remarks	Host — EMPRI–BeST

A Note on the Format:

This session is structured as a working discussion rather than a traditional roundtable. Through the course of the conversation, we'll ask each of you targeted questions about how your partnership actually worked — how it started, how risk and financing were split, and what it would take to replicate it elsewhere. Your answers will be captured live and used to create a report on co-designing a **Partnership Framework**, which becomes the documented outcome of the session. In effect, the roundtable discussion *is* the report-writing process — so we'd encourage candid, specific answers (including what didn't work) rather than polished takeaways, since those are what make the framework genuinely reusable for other cities.

Partnership Framework Template

1. Entry Point — How the Partnership Started

What triggered the collaboration (tender, MoU, informal pilot, hackathon connection) and who initiated it.

2. Roles & Division of Labour

What the ULB owns vs. what the startup owns vs. where the financier sits (e.g., waste collection vs. processing vs. capital).

3. Contracting & Governance Mechanism

The legal/administrative form that held the partnership together (service contract, PPP, MoU, informal handshake) and its duration.

4. Financing Structure

Revenue model — who pays whom, tipping fees, subsidy, blended finance, outcome-based payment — and where the capital gap typically shows up.

5. Risk Allocation

Who absorbed delays, quality failures, or funding gaps, and whether that allocation was explicit or assumed.

6. Champion-Dependence Point

The specific moment the partnership would have collapsed without one individual pushing it, and what would need to exist instead.

7. Scale Trigger

The condition that needs to be true before a pilot can be replicated city-wide (proof metric, policy change, budget line, political sign-off).

8. Replication Checklist

The 3–5 things that must be true in a new city for this model to transfer — the reusable part of the pathway.

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