Thematic track: "From Source to Seas: Science-informed pathways for transforming plastic and chemical pollution governance"

Date: February 25, 2026, | **Time**: 12:00 – 13:30 | **Venue**: Taj Palace, New Delhi, India

Background: Plastic and chemical pollution has emerged as one of the defining sustainability challenges of our time. Its impacts extend far beyond marine environments, affecting rivers, soils, cities, ecosystems, human health, livelihoods, and local economies. Across the plastics lifecycle, from production and consumption to waste management and environmental release, pollution accumulates through multiple pathways and across different sectors of society.

Research from the India–Norway cooperation project on capacity building for reducing plastic and chemical pollution in India (INOPOL) shows that marine pollution cannot be addressed in isolation. Rivers, urban settlements, and industrial clusters play a critical role in transporting plastics and hazardous pollutants from land to sea. Monitoring and modelling from river basins such as the Cauvery reveal how plastic leakage continues despite high reported collection rates, how pollution levels rise during monsoon seasons, and how plastics interact with persistent organic pollutants (POPs) in the environment.

Plastic pollution, ranging from visible debris to micro- and nano-plastics, harms marine life through ingestion, entanglement, and habitat degradation. At the same time, POPs persist in the ecosystems, bioaccumulate in food chains, and pose long-term risks to the environment and human health. Plastics can act as vectors for these chemicals, increasing exposure risks, particularly for workers and communities involved in waste collection and recycling activities.

Recent modelling estimates indicates that India is among the world's largest contributors to plastic pollution emissions driven by rapid consumption growth and uneven waste management capacity. Addressing this challenge requires more than technical fixes. It calls for science-informed action, stronger implementation of existing regulations, improved monitoring and data systems, and approaches that recognise local realities, including the role

of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), informal waste workers, and gendered exposure patterns.

Against this backdrop, INOPOL hosts a thematic track at the WSDS 2026 that positions plastic and chemical pollution as a broader sustainable development challenge requiring robust scientific evidence and science-informed policy responses. Drawing on integrated monitoring, modelling, and field-based research from river basins such as the Cauvery, the session will show how data on pollution sources, transport pathways and exposure risks can be translated into practical policy and management decisions. By combining environmental measurements with socio-economic analysis, the session highlights the value of interdisciplinary science in shaping more effective, inclusive, and sustainable pathways for reducing plastic and chemical pollution in India and beyond.

Objectives of the thematic track

- Present robust scientific evidence from integrated monitoring, modelling and field research on POPs pollution, and show how this can inform policy and management across riverine, urban and marine systems.
- Examine science-informed policy pathways for reducing plastic and chemical pollution, including Single-use plastic (SUP) bans, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), state-level action plans and circular economy measures, with attention to implementation challenges and real-world outcomes.
- Highlight inclusive and just transition pathways by bringing together perspectives from researchers, policymakers, industry, MSMEs, waste workers and civil society to explore how sustainability transformations can be socially grounded, equitable and evidence based.

About the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS)

The World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) is the annual flagship Track II initiative organized by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI). Instituted in 2001, the Summit series has a legacy of over two decades for making ‘sustainable development’ a globally shared goal. The only independently convened international Summit on sustainable development and environment, based in the Global South, WSDS strives to provide long-term solutions for the benefit of global communities by assembling the world’s most enlightened leaders and thinkers on a single platform. The 2026 edition of WSDS will mark the Silver Jubilee of the Summit. This 25th edition of the milestone event will be held from 25–27 February 2026 at the Taj Palace, New Delhi, under the umbrella theme: “**Transformations: Vision, Voices, and Values for Sustainable Development**”

Agenda (Tentative) of the Thematic track event

Time	Agenda Item
2-3 minutes	**Welcome Address**: Dr. Hans N. Adam (NIVA)
2-3 minutes	**INOPOL Documentary**
7 minutes	**Special Address**: Her Excellency **May-Elin Stener***, Ambassador of Norway to India. The Royal Norwegian Embassy in New Delhi **TBD**
7 minutes	**Special Address:** Dr. Supriya Sahu, Additional Chief Secretary to the Government of Tamil Nadu. Head of Department of Environment, Climate Change and Forests. **TBD**
7 minutes	**Special Address**: Mr Tanmay Kumar*, IAS, Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India TBD
7 minutes	**Special Address:** Dr. Balakrishna Pisupati, Head, UNEP, India TBD
5 minutes	Release of the reports by dignitaries on the dais: • Plastic Waste Strategy Report for Tamil Nadu • Action Plan on Management of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) in Tamil Nadu
35 minutes	**Presentations (10 minutes)** Introducing the videos 3–4-minute video: INOPOL findings on plastic waste management 3-4 minute: INOPOL findings on POPs **Panel Discussion** (25 minutes) **Chair**: Dr. Girija Bharat (MGC) **Panelists:** Dr. Rachel Hurley (NIVA), Dr. Sissel Brit Ranneklev (NIVA), Dr. Smita Mohanty (CIPET), Dr. Paromita Chakraborty (SRM), Mr. Piyush Mohapatra (Toxics Link) / Mr. Satish Sinha (Toxics Link)
10-15 minutes	**Question and answer:** Mr. Nathaniel Dkhar (MGC)
1 minute	**Concluding remarks:** Dr. Hans N. Adam (NIVA)