

Annual Report 2025



Contents

Director's Message	3
Across the Globe	5
Features	7
50 Years of Global Impact	7
AI & Sustainability	10
Nature-based Solutions for Resilience	14
Research & Policy Development	17
Governance for Climate Change & Sustainable Development	18
Biodiversity & Society	20
Water & Resource Management	22
Innovation & Education	24
Capacity Development & Training	26
Postgraduate Education	28
Knowledge Transfer & Communications	30
Publications	31
In the News	32
Voices of UNU-IAS	34
About UNU-IAS	36

Director's Message

This year UNU-IAS celebrated two important milestones — the 50th anniversary of UNU and the 80th anniversary of the United Nations. Reflecting on UNU's evolution as the academic arm of the UN system, we redoubled our commitment to generating science-based solutions for the world's most pressing problems.

Throughout this year we held a series of events in celebration of the 50th anniversary, including a special ceremony in September that welcomed Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan. Following the ceremony, Their Majesties participated in a private tea reception with 16 UNU-IAS students, who engaged in an intimate exchange discussing their research topics and aspirations.

Our policy engagement at the global, national and local levels advanced efforts to build a more sustainable future, tackling climate change and biodiversity loss while ensuring the well-being of people and communities. At the 2025 UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France, UNU-IAS promoted integrated solutions to support ocean recovery that balances conservation and livelihoods. Our events at the 2025 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in New York addressed ocean plastic pollution and human health, the role of higher education in fostering science-driven solutions for sustainability, and community-led initiatives for socio-ecological resilience.

In November UNU-IAS experts were at the 2025 UN Climate Change Conference in Belém, Brazil (COP30), which delivered new commitments to boost climate finance and accelerate action. We provided expertise and policy inputs through events, dialogue and media commentary, and empowered youth by engaging university and high school students.

To address the rapidly evolving challenges and opportunities presented by AI, UNU-IAS launched a new podcast exploring its role in achieving the SDGs, with a focus on higher education. The first seven episodes have featured leading experts such as Tshilidzi Marwala (UNU Rector and UN Under-Secretary-General) and Bernardo Mariano Junior (UN Chief Information Technology Officer), as well as students. We held panel sessions on AI at the Global Sustainable Development Congress in Istanbul and the UNU Macau AI Conference in Macau, China, which emphasized the need for AI literacy and ethical, inclusive development. A workshop in September provided training on AI in higher education for Asian Development Bank staff and government officials from developing countries.

UNU-IAS strengthened local capacity for the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific region through the Mayors Academy for Sustainable Urban Development. In Japan, the institute's Operating Unit Ishikawa/Kanazawa (OUIK) connected local and global efforts on ecosystem restoration and recovery from the 2024 Noto Peninsula earthquake. Our events in Kanazawa advanced a multi-hazard approach to disaster recovery and resilience, and gathered global experts to develop strategies for restoring urban ecosystems through community engagement and culture.

Other UNU-IAS activities celebrating the 50th anniversary of UNU included a session at the Ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 9), workshops at Osaka EXPO 2025, and a conference in Okayama, Japan for the 20th anniversary of the Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (RCEs).

UNU-IAS continued to train the sustainability leaders of tomorrow through our postgraduate degrees and innovative short courses, including a unique

specialization on the Paris Agreement. This was featured prominently at COP30 by the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) as an initiative building much-needed expertise for countries to meet their climate commitments.

We published books on business and biodiversity, action-oriented pedagogies for sustainability, and geospatial AI for addressing river basin risks. Our reports and policy briefs provided recommendations for reforming subsidies that harm biodiversity, tackling ocean acidification, advancing just energy transitions and ensuring inclusive education for climate-displaced populations. In the media UNU-IAS experts offered valuable insights on topics such as climate adaptation indicators, Africa's energy future, reimagining TICAD and bias in AI.

These achievements — and the many other featured in this report — truly reflected the spirit of UNU's 50 years of global impact by mobilizing knowledge and partnerships to drive evidence-based solutions for sustainability. They were built on the support and commitment of our valued partners and donors, whose invaluable contributions enable and enhance the work of UNU-IAS. We deeply appreciate your collaboration, and look forward to building on these shared successes as we pursue the urgent global challenges ahead.

Shinobu (Yume) Yamaguchi

Director, UNU-IAS



Across the Globe

Europe

Research Fieldwork

Assisi & Spoleto, ITALY

Presentations & Lectures

Laxenburg, AUSTRIA

Bonn, GERMANY

Rome, ITALY

Menorca, SPAIN

Cambridge, UK

Asia & Oceania

Events

Beijing, CHINA

Macau, CHINA

Goyang, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Istanbul, TÜRKIYE

Abu Dhabi, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Research Fieldwork

Dhaka, BANGLADESH

Jakarta, INDONESIA

Rawalpindi, PAKISTAN

Presentations & Lectures

Ningbo, CHINA

Shanghai, CHINA

Suzhou, CHINA

Guwahati, INDIA

Jakarta, INDONESIA

Seoul, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Jeju, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Putrajaya, MALAYSIA

Ulaanbaatar, MONGOLIA

Rawalpindi, PAKISTAN

Singapore, SINGAPORE

Bangkok, THAILAND

Africa

Events

Nairobi, KENYA

Tharfield, SOUTH AFRICA

Research Fieldwork

Nairobi, KENYA

Presentations & Lectures

Wa, GHANA

Mombasa, KENYA

Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA

Tharfield, SOUTH AFRICA

217
Activities

25
Countries

7,079
Event Participants

Japan

Events

- Fukuoka
- Hiroshima
- Kanazawa
- Kitakyushu
- Kochi
- Kumamoto
- Matsuyama
- Nagoya
- Nanao
- Noto
- Okayama
- Osaka
- Sapporo
- Sendai
- Takamatsu
- Tokyo
- Toyohashi
- Wajima
- Yokkaichi
- Yokohama

Research Fieldwork

- Hitachiota
- Kaga
- Kanazawa
- Nomi
- Sado

Presentations & Lectures

- Fukuoka
- Hakusan
- Kanazawa
- Kobe
- Komatsu
- Kyoto
- Nagaoka
- Nagoya
- Nanao
- Sagamihara
- Osaka
- Sapporo
- Suzu
- Suzuka
- Tokyo
- Toyama
- Wajima

Americas

Events

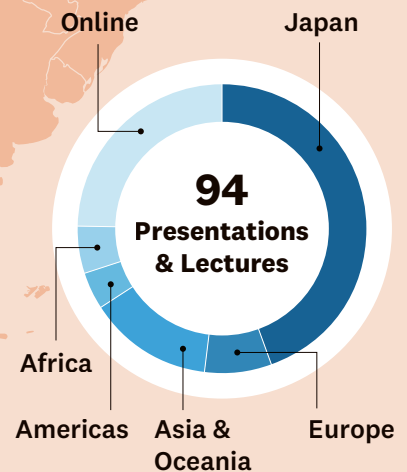
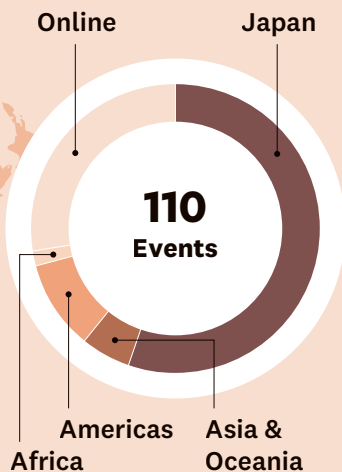
- Belém, BRAZIL
- Panama City, PANAMA
- New York, USA

Research Fieldwork

- Vancouver, CANADA

Presentations & Lectures

- Belém, BRAZIL
- Toronto, CANADA
- Guam, USA
- New York, USA



Features

50 Years of Global Impact



In 2025 UNU celebrated half a century generating evidence-based solutions to the world's most pressing problems. Since 1975 it has grown from a single office in Tokyo into a global network of institutes on five continents, advancing knowledge and education for peace and progress.

The university's impacts and achievements underline the vital need for timely, independent research to inform evidence-based policymaking and multilateral action.

As it continues in this mission, UNU has a renewed focus on three priorities: knowledge, partnerships and impact — with a redoubled commitment to expanding partnerships and presence in the Global South.



UNU-IAS celebrated the 50th anniversary with a series of special events and activities throughout the year, which exemplified the crucial role of UNU in bridging research, education and policy.

As part of a commemorative ceremony at UNU headquarters (Tokyo, 18 September), 16 UNU-IAS students participated in a **private tea reception with Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan**, engaging in conversations about the students' studies and aspirations. The ceremony featured a rare address in English by His Majesty the Emperor, describing UNU as "a beacon of knowledge, innovation and collaboration in the service of humanity." Other distinguished speakers included senior ministers of the Government of Japan, members of the National Diet of Japan and the Governor of Tokyo. A video message from UN Secretary-General António Guterres recognized UNU as "truly multilateralism in action", highlighting its role in uniting the world through knowledge and partnerships.

On International Day of Education (24 January) UNU-IAS launched its **AI & Sustainability podcast** (see pg. 11), releasing the first two episodes. They featured UNU Rector Tshilidzi Marwala discussing the challenge of algorithmic bias in AI systems, and Lei Motilla, Co-founder of AI4GOV, considering how AI is reshaping the future of work. Subsequent episodes have explored issues such as international AI governance, how AI is reshaping learning experiences for youth, and the potential of AI to mitigate climate risks.

The institute's Operating Unit Ishikawa/Kanazawa (OUIK) organized **events supporting the recovery of the Noto Peninsula** in Japan, following the earthquake of 1 January 2024. A symposium in Kanazawa, Japan (20 March) engaged international and local experts to discuss disaster recovery and socio-ecological challenges. Two talk events (Tokyo, 22 February & 1 March) showcased community initiatives for sustainability and resilience.

At the **2025 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development** (HLPF) in New York (14–23 July), UNU-IAS organized events addressing the health impacts of ocean plastic pollution, the role of higher education in driving systemic change, and community-led solutions for biodiversity. The institute provided expert inputs on climate–SDG synergies at a special event hosted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and the UNFCCC Secretariat.

UNU-IAS contributed to the **Ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development** (TICAD 9) in Yokohama, Japan, showcasing the institute's Global Leadership Training Programme for Sustainable Development (GLTP). A Thematic Event on 21 August engaged GLTP participants and alumni to reflect on the interdisciplinary and community-based research skills they had acquired from the programme. Other events, in collaboration with the UNU Office of the Rector (20 August), examined digital governance in Africa and the potential for AI to reshape the continent's higher education landscape.



A series of interactive UNU-IAS workshops at **EXPO 2025** in Osaka, Japan (27–31 August) engaged school students in learning about global sustainability issues. Sessions focused on biodiversity and resilience featured students from the region affected by the Noto Peninsula earthquake and the prominent science communicator Sakana-kun. Workshops on local solutions shared insights from Kenya, Malaysia and the Philippines, presented by members of the institute's Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (RCEs).



The **14th Global RCE Conference** (Okayama, Japan; 21–23 October) also celebrated the network’s 20th anniversary, bringing together more than 260 participants from across the globe to reflect on its achievements and future direction. The conference launched a special publication (see pg. 24) and produced the Okayama Declaration 2025, reaffirming the commitment of the RCE network to transformative education.



At the **2025 UN Climate Change Conference** in Belém, Brazil (UNFCCC COP30; 10–21 November) UNU-IAS events advanced policy dialogue and promoted youth empowerment. The institute engaged two university students and two high school students in its delegation, who presented their climate initiatives and provided valuable youth perspectives.



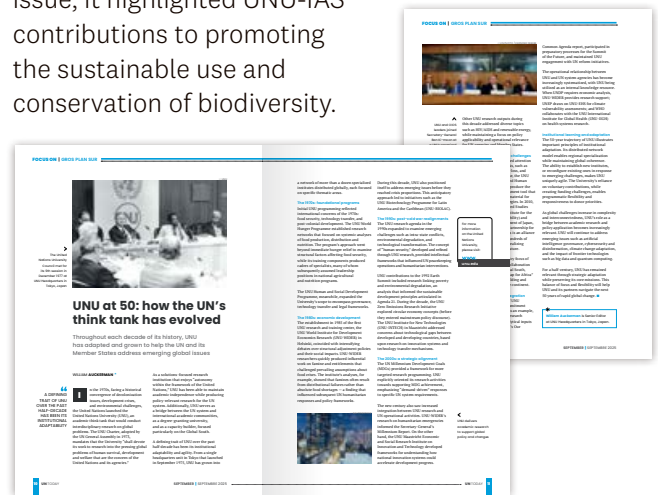
Read more:

- Governance for Climate Change & Sustainable Development* ▶ pg. 18
- Biodiversity & Society* ▶ pg. 20
- Innovation & Education* ▶ pg. 24
- Capacity Development & Training* ▶ pg. 26

Other UNU-IAS events celebrating the 50th anniversary included a World Water Day seminar (online, 25 March), a session at the Global Sustainable Development Congress (Istanbul, 18 June) and a roundtable at the UNU AI Conference (Macau, China; 24 October).

UNU at 50: How the UN’s Think Tank Has Evolved

UNU-IAS and the UNU Office of Communications produced a special feature in *UN Today* — a monthly magazine for international civil servants — charting the evolution of UNU. Published in the September 2025 issue, it highlighted UNU-IAS contributions to promoting the sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity.



Features

AI & Sustainability

AI is already transforming the way we work, learn and live. This rapidly evolving technology brings immense potential benefits for humanity, including the promise of dramatically accelerating progress across the SDGs. But it also poses profound risks — some of which are already manifesting, and others that remain uncertain.

Navigating this transformation requires responsible and responsive governance. The Global Digital Compact, adopted by

Member States in September 2024, provides a roadmap for building a digital future that benefits all of humanity. It commits governments to uphold international law and human rights, and calls on all stakeholders to ensure that the digital space is inclusive, safe and secure.



To advance the global conversation on the opportunities, risks and implications of AI, in January UNU-IAS **launched the podcast AI & Sustainability**. Providing insights from leading experts and practitioners, it explores the intersection of AI, education and the SDGs. Guests have included Tshildzi Marwala (UNU Rector), Bernardo Mariano Junior (UN Chief Information Technology Officer), Lei Motilla

(co-founder of AI4GOV) and Gunter Saunders (Director of Digital Capability Development and AI Leadership at the University of Westminster), as well as students of UNU-IAS and partner universities. The podcast is produced by UNU-IAS and the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC), as part of the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI; see pg. 24).

AI & Sustainability Podcast

Episodes released during 2025



- Are AI Systems Inherently Biased?
- Should Young People Worry about How AI Is Changing the Nature of Work?
- Can AI Help Achieve Social Justice?
- How Will AI-driven Transformations Impact Higher Education?
- Does AI Make Us Lazy Thinkers?
- What Does a Human-centred Approach to AI Mean in University Management?

▶ [Listen now on YouTube, Spotify and Apple Podcasts](#)

At the Global Sustainable Development Congress 2025 in Istanbul (GSDC; 16–19 June), UNU-IAS organized the panel session **Empowering the Future: Advancing AI Literacy Across Sectors** (18 June). Featuring experts from UNESCO, academia, the technology industry and student organizations, it explored how AI education can go beyond technical skills development to cultivate ethical awareness, critical thinking and cross-sectoral collaboration. The event juxtaposed actual outputs from generative AI with expert insights, informing a discussion that underlined the importance of cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural competencies. The panel built on the GSDC keynote address by UNU Rector Tshildzi Marwala, which emphasized the importance of inclusive AI governance frameworks and ethical standards that reflect global equity.

UNU-IAS collaborated with the UNU Institute in Macau (UNU Macau) on the **UNU Macau AI Conference 2025**, which explored how AI can accelerate SDG progress while ensuring ethical, inclusive and human-centered



development (Macau, China; 23–25 October). UNU-IAS experts contributed to sessions on the transformative potential of AI in higher education research and governance. The institute organized a roundtable on inclusive strategies for AI integration (24 October), which highlighted challenges and opportunities for institutions in the Global South. Discussion underlined how leveraging global advancements in AI and fostering local innovation ecosystems could help developing countries to leapfrog traditional barriers and build infrastructure systems that are both resilient to climate change and inclusive of all people.

UNU-IAS delivered two interactive **AI Learning Lab** webinars focused on the potential of AI to transform university research, management and administration. The first, *Harnessing AI for Smarter, Sustainable University Management* (26 September), explored predictive analytics, ethical applications of AI, the use of AI personas and agents, and governance frameworks. The second webinar, *AI in Action: Advancing Research for the SDGs* (10 December), considered how AI-driven research methodologies can be implemented ethically and sustainably, and how AI can shape institutional research practices grounded in transparency, accountability and justice. The webinar series is organized by UNU-IAS and UNESCO IESALC as part of HESI.

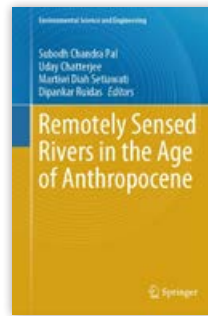


In collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), UNU-IAS provided **training on AI in Higher Education** for ADB staff and government officials from developing countries (2 September). It brought together officials from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Georgia, India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Uzbekistan with experts from Japanese universities. Expert presentations showcased innovative applications in teaching and learning, research, university management, and AI ethics and governance, highlighting pioneering work from leading Japanese institutions. Participants discussed ethical AI integration in higher education and laid groundwork for collaboration on sustainable AI-driven transformation across Asia.



Remotely Sensed Rivers in the Age of Anthropocene

Applying a geospatial AI approach, this book addresses risks in river basins such as climate change, flooding, landslides and mudslides, soil erosion and land degradation. It supports scientists and policymakers in tackling these urgent environmental and socioeconomic concerns through cutting-edge technologies based on open source software. The book was published by Springer in March.



“Investing in education that prepares all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds, to be active participants in the AI revolution can be transformative.”

Jerome Silla
Research Associate

Read more:

Innovation & Education ► pg. 24

Capacity Development & Training ► pg. 26

Features

Nature-based Solutions for Resilience

Nature-based solutions are emerging as some of the most powerful and cost-effective ways to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises. By protecting, restoring and sustainably managing ecosystems, they increase resilience while addressing social challenges and enhancing people's well-being. These multi-purpose approaches are community-driven and tailored to local conditions, often bringing much broader benefits than traditional approaches.

Scaling up nature-based solutions will be essential to strengthen the resilience of communities to rising climate risks. This requires deeper scientific understanding to inform evidence-based practices, together with investment in expertise and capacities for implementation. As these innovative tools expand in use, they must continue to be grounded in robust science, inclusive governance and the rights of communities and Indigenous peoples.



Through its unit in Kanazawa, Japan, UNU-IAS is advancing nature-based solutions that connect local sustainability efforts to the global policy agenda. The **UNU-IAS Operating Unit Ishikawa/Kanazawa (OUIK)** works with local partners to mobilize policy-relevant knowledge and develop a sustainable model for urban nature that reflects links between biological and cultural diversity.

Since the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake and subsequent torrential rains, OUIK has been closely **supporting nature-based recovery** through research, policy development, awareness-raising, education and youth empowerment activities. During 2025 the unit's research informed local governments, including for the Nanao City Recovery Plan, on **ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction (Eco-DRR)**. OUIK underlined the importance of traditional water systems in presentations to the Japan Waterworks Association and other stakeholders, as well as draft Guidelines for Emergency Groundwater Use.

A UNU-IAS symposium in Kanazawa (20 March) discussed **disaster recovery that goes beyond infrastructure to address socio-ecological challenges** such as ecosystem damage, livelihood disruptions, cultural loss and demographic changes. Local leaders and experts in diverse fields exchanged insights from the Tohoku and Noto regions of Japan, as well as other countries. They emphasized the need to leverage connections between people, nature and

place for sustainable recovery that addresses social, environmental and economic dimensions. UNU-IAS organized a series of **Noto Satoyama Satoumi Talk events** in Tokyo, exploring local sustainability initiatives and disaster recovery efforts on the Noto Peninsula (22 February & 1 March). They engaged local farmers and producers of rice, vegetables, soy sauce and sweets to discuss the impact of natural disasters on communities and post-disaster revitalization, underlining the importance of incorporating local culture for long-term resilience.



OUIK has been a key partner of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) **#GenerationRestoration** project, which is tackling ecological degradation in urban areas through nature-based solutions. The unit informed the strategy of Kanazawa City as a **#GenerationRestoration Role Model City**, and helped to guide city-level planning, integrate ecosystem services into urban





decision-making and promote citizen engagement in restoration activities. On 20–22 May, UNU-IAS gathered experts from 11 global cities in Kanazawa to develop strategies for restoring urban ecosystems through community engagement and culture. A public symposium, held on International Day for Biological Diversity (Kanazawa, 22 May), discussed innovative approaches for regenerating urban ecosystems while safeguarding and celebrating cultural heritage. Experts shared restoration initiatives from seven cities: Kanazawa; Kisumu, Kenya; Istanbul; Mexico City; Paris; Seattle, USA; and Toronto, Canada. The OUIK project **Sustainable Urban Nature** conducted participatory research in Kanazawa and repurposed abandoned land as a site for nature-based solutions, establishing a community garden co-managed by local residents.

UNU-IAS also strengthened youth capacity and engagement in building more sustainable and resilient communities, including local disaster recovery efforts. The 41st session of the **UNU Global Seminar** focused on resilience and innovation in Ishikawa Prefecture, engaging 30 participants from 12 countries (10–13 August). They

explored the interconnectedness of urban nature and culture in Kanazawa City, creative reconstruction on the Noto Peninsula, and biocultural diversity at the Mount Hakusan UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and the Hakusan Tedorigawa UNESCO Global Geopark.

The OUIK **Next-Generation Leader Development Programme** trained 15 students from across Ishikawa Prefecture, fostering systems thinking, critical analysis and communication skills to prepare youth for active roles in international dialogue. Participant feedback was very positive, highlighting strong learning outcomes and the deep subject knowledge of lecturers. In particular, participants appreciated the programme’s broadening of perspectives beyond typical study topics, which deepened their understanding of the social and economic dilemmas embedded in sustainability challenges. The programme supported two high school students to join the **2025 UN Climate Change Conference** (UNFCCC COP30) in Belém, Brazil, where they presented at OUIK events exploring links between culture, nature and climate action (19 & 20 November).



“Resilience is not a fixed end state, but a continuing process of learning, adapting and responding to change over time. Younger generations need to be part of shaping that process, and we must listen, learn and act with them.”

Yoko Tomita
Programme Coordinator

Read more:

Biodiversity & Society ▶ pg. 20

Capacity Development & Training ▶ pg. 26



Research & Policy Development

UNU-IAS generates interdisciplinary scientific knowledge to inform policymaking, advancing the global effort to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Our research and policy development activities address specific goals as well as the interconnections between them, helping to translate the global agenda into action at the regional, national and local levels. Combining in-house expertise with a diverse network of partner institutions, UNU-IAS bridges the developing and developed worlds, and strengthens the links between science and policy that will be critical for achieving the SDGs.

Governance for Climate Change & Sustainable Development	▶ pg. 18
Biodiversity & Society	▶ pg. 20
Water & Resource Management	▶ pg. 22
Innovation & Education	▶ pg. 24



Governance for Climate Change & Sustainable Development

POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Mayors Academy for Sustainable Urban Development

Since 2019 this initiative has been building a network of mayors in the Asia-Pacific region to strengthen leadership and foster peer-to-peer learning for achieving the SDGs. The 2025 course engaged participants through 10 online sessions and a three-day in-person session. Seven mayors from six countries completed the course. The graduation ceremony was held at the 10th Congress of United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific (UCLG ASPAC) in Goyang, Republic of Korea (24 September). The Academy is a collaboration with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), UN-Habitat, UCLG ASPAC and other partners.

POLICY ENGAGEMENT

2025 UN Climate Change Conference

Held in Belém, Brazil at the mouth of the Amazon River, COP30 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) delivered commitments to boost climate finance and accelerate action (10–21 November). UNU-IAS provided science-based expertise through events, policy dialogue and media commentary, and promoted youth empowerment by engaging university and high school students as part of its delegation.

A UNU side event with the World Health Organization (WHO) and other UN partners provided high-level expert perspectives on the Belém Health Action Plan that was launched at COP30 — the first international climate adaptation plan dedicated to health (14 November). An event led by the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) discussed the UNU-IAS postgraduate degree programmes, including the Diploma Programme for Specialization on the Paris Agreement (SPA) as an initiative building climate expertise in the public sector (19 November).

Two university students from Japan and Malaysia, who were participating in the Global Youth MIDORI Platform

(GYM; see below), presented in UNU-IAS events at the Global Alliance of Universities on Climate Pavilion (17 November), the SDG Pavilion (19 November) and the Capacity Building Hub (19 November). The UNU-IAS Next-Generation Leader Development Programme (see pg. 16) engaged two high school students from Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan, who presented in events at the Thailand Pavilion (19 & 20 November).

POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Climate & SDG Synergies

At the 2025 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), UNU-IAS contributed to a Special Event on synergies between climate action and the SDGs (New York, 22 July). The institute shared knowledge and examples illustrating nature-based solutions for cities and regions to adapt to climate change by managing flood risks, reduce drought risks and mitigate the urban heat island effect. The event was hosted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and the UNFCCC Secretariat.

PROJECT

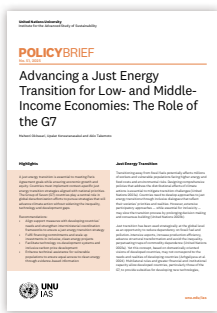
Global Youth MIDORI (GYM) Platform

Launched in June 2024, this project provides young people with opportunities to contribute to international policymaking and supports Member States in promoting meaningful youth participation. In collaboration with AEON Environmental Foundation, it provides training to youth and supports selected participants to contribute to global conferences.

An online training session (4–6 August) engaged 15 undergraduate students from eight countries, selecting two students to participate in UNFCCC COP30 as part of the UNU-IAS delegation (see above). UNU-IAS also secured GYM alumni participation in the Climate Youth Negotiator Programme, an NGO-led initiative supporting youth inclusion in national delegations to UNFCCC COPs.

PUBLICATION

Just Energy Transition



This UNU-IAS Policy Brief (No. 51, 2025) provides recommendations for G7 policymakers to support effective decarbonization and just and equitable energy transition in all countries. It identifies emerging issues and key insights based on analysis of 17 Biennial Update Reports. (Full title: Advancing a Just Energy Transition for Low- and Middle-Income Economies: The Role of the G7.)

POLICY ENGAGEMENT

UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration

The 24th session of the CEPA, held at UN headquarters in New York (7-11 April), focused on the theme Governance and Institutional Perspectives on Advancing Sustainable, Inclusive, Science and Evidence-based Solutions for the SDGs. UNU-IAS provided expert inputs on sustainable public finance and building strong institutions and governance for climate action. This contribution was reflected in the official report on the session, which was recognized by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC; resolution E/RES/2025/31).

POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Climate Assessments

In August two UNU-IAS experts were selected by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as Lead Authors for the Seventh Assessment Report (AR7). They will provide scientific expertise for AR7 Working Group III on Mitigation of Climate Change, which assesses methods for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. UNU-IAS is also contributing to the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities in the role of Lead Author.

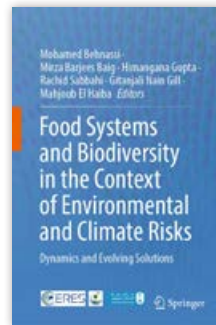
EVENT

Youth Ocean Summit

This event engaged students, experts and business representatives to share innovative marine sustainability and youth-led conservation efforts (Tokyo, 13 December). High school and university students — including two GYM Platform participants (see across) — discussed institutional barriers and psychological challenges to youth participation in policymaking. The event featured a screening of the documentary “What They Didn’t Teach Us”, produced by youth and focused on connections between people and the ocean in Okinawa, Japan.

PUBLICATION

Food Systems and Biodiversity in the Context of Environmental and Climate Risks



This book explores how environmental and climate changes disrupt ecosystems and threaten food security (Springer, August 2025). Grounded in empirical research in Asia, Africa and other regions, it provides a systems-based approach to managing trade-offs, fostering synergies and driving sustainable food and climate strategies.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Youth Empowerment for the SDGs in Japan

The 10th Japan Youth Environmental Activity Contest and Workshop (Tokyo, 1-2 February), brought together students from 16 high schools across Japan to introduce their projects addressing local sustainability challenges. The participants had won eight regional contests engaging a total of 103 high school and student clubs. The UNU-IAS Director’s Award was presented to Hokkaido Iwamizawa Agricultural High School, for a project transforming local waste into sustainable energy solutions for agriculture by using snow for cooling and rice husks for heating greenhouses. The events were organized by UNU-IAS, MOEJ and the Environmental Restoration and Conservation Agency of Japan (ERCA).



Biodiversity & Society

PARTNERSHIP

International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative (IPSI)

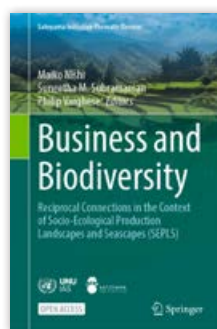
This partnership engages more than 340 members across the globe — from national governments and multilateral development banks to Indigenous community organizations and private companies — to advance transformational change towards living in harmony with nature. It promotes the conservation and sustainable management of socio-ecological production landscapes and seascapes (SEPLS), areas where people have a symbiotic relationship with ecosystems. As its secretariat, UNU-IAS facilitates the partnership's research, capacity development and policy engagement activities.

During 2025 the institute mobilized knowledge from IPSI to provide evidence-based inputs to CBD processes, including the global report on implementation of the GBF. UNU-IAS provided technical inputs in CBD workshops addressing ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction (Cambridge, UK; 7–9 May) and policy coherence for implementing the Rio Conventions (online; 15 June). At CBD meetings in Panama City (20–30 October), UNU-IAS held a series of side events that highlighted practical pathways to advance inclusive, evidence-informed biodiversity action. The events underlined the need for stronger integration of diverse knowledge systems, policy coherence, multistakeholder collaboration and community-led monitoring.

An IPSI funding initiative, the Satoyama Development Mechanism, is implemented in collaboration with the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, Japan (IGES). During 2025 it supported five projects, in Benin, Colombia, Ecuador, the Philippines and Uganda, and an inception workshop was held online on 6 February.

PUBLICATION

Business & Biodiversity: Reciprocal Connections in the Context of SEPLS



This open-access book considers challenges and opportunities for promoting more sustainable businesses while safeguarding biodiversity and ecosystems (Springer, February). It draws on 12 case studies that exemplify innovative solutions to facilitate more sustainable business decisions and actions for socially and ecologically sound

outcomes. The book provides inputs to assessments by the Intergovernmental Science–Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and adds to the growing momentum in business and finance to commit to halting biodiversity loss and delivering nature-positive solutions. The book is part of the Satoyama Initiative Thematic Review (SITR) series, which shares case studies from IPSI members.

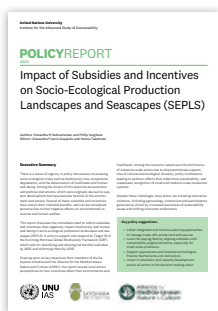
POLICY ENGAGEMENT

2025 UN Ocean Conference

At the 2025 UN Ocean Conference, UNU-IAS promoted integrated solutions to support ocean recovery that balances conservation and livelihoods (Nice, France; 9–13 June). The institute organized a side event on the application of landscape approaches to advance SDG 14 (life below water) and foster socio-ecological resilience in seascapes (9 June). It underscored the importance of integrated approaches that consider diverse ecosystems and stakeholders to support sustainable economies and ocean recovery. The event shared practical experiences from IPSI members, including participatory science in the Aegean Sea; watershed councils on the islands of El Hierro in Spain and Gyros in Greece; a youth platform for stone weir restoration in Penghu, Taiwan, China; and nature-positive engineering in Western Australia.

PUBLICATION

Impact of Subsidies and Incentives on SEPLS



Published in April, this UNU-IAS report highlights the need to reform economic policies that negatively impact biodiversity and human well-being in SEPLS. Drawing on diverse perspectives from local actors, the report explores the nuances of how different types of subsidies and incentives affect the environment and livelihoods.

It provides policy solutions to support and respond to Target 18 of the GBF, which calls for identifying and phasing out harmful subsidies by 2025 and reforming them by 2030.

PROJECT

Community Development & Knowledge Management for the Satoyama Initiative (COMDEKS)

This flagship project of IPSI promotes sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources within local communities through small-scale financing, providing grants to local organizations. The fourth phase of COMDEKS is supporting projects in 15 developing countries during the period 2023–2028, with support from the Ministry of the Environment, Japan (MOEJ) and the Keidanren Nature Conservation Council (KNCC). COMDEKS is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme.

The transformative potential of IPSI and COMDEKS were showcased at the 2025 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) through a UNU-IAS side event focused on community-led initiatives for socio-ecological resilience (online; 17 July). The roundtable featured insights from local leaders implementing COMDEKS projects in Bhutan, Kyrgyzstan and Morocco. The event highlighted the SEPLS Resilience Indicators, a participatory tool developed by UNU-IAS to strengthen community resilience, which has been applied during COMDEKS Phase 4 to advance the GBF and the SDGs. COMDEKS implementation was also shared through a seminar in Tokyo (22 April), which presented case studies from Cameroon, Costa Rica and Türkiye.

EVENT

Inclusive Stewardship for Biodiversity Conservation

A UNU-IAS session at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress discussed biodiversity conservation efforts by non-state actors, including Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, private entities and citizens (Abu Dhabi, 10 October). The event explored how Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) can advance Target 3 of the GBF, which aims to conserve 30% of global land and sea by 2030. The event was co-organized by UNU-IAS, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the European Union.

EVENT

Second AEON SATOYAMA Forum

This event discussed the *satoyama* model for sustainable living and biodiversity conservation (Tokyo, 18 February). It shared innovative solutions stemming from collaboration between Japanese universities, local communities, local governments and the AEON Environmental Foundation — an IPSI member. UNU-IAS emphasized the need for cross-border collaboration to address socio-ecological challenges and promote knowledge-sharing and innovation. The event was organized with AEON Environmental Foundation and MOEJ.





Water & Resource Management

POLICY ENGAGEMENT

World Water Development Report

UNU-IAS contributed to the 2026 UN World Water Development Report by integrating diverse expertise and research to influence global water policy and sustainability. This policy engagement was led by the UNU Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH) as part of the UNU Water Network, which facilitates knowledge exchange and joint efforts across and beyond the UNU system to develop effective strategies for water management.

POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Ocean Plastic Pollution & Human Health

At the 2025 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), UNU-IAS convened an official side event to discuss the complex interconnections between ocean plastic pollution and human health (New York, 18 July). It built on the outcomes of the 2025 UN Ocean Conference (see pg. 20) and advanced policy dialogue for the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution and UNFCCC. Experts from the UN system, governments and academia developed strategies for bridging action and strengthening partnerships by stakeholders of SDG 3 (good health & well-being) and SDG 14 (life below water). The discussion highlighted the urgent need to strengthen science-policy dialogue, interdisciplinary research and education on these interlinkages.



PUBLICATION

Promoting Water Valuation for Urban Sustainable Development in Asia



Water valuation — the process of recognizing, measuring and incorporating the multiple values of water — can advance integrated approaches to address water challenges. This UNU-IAS Policy Brief (No. 52, 2025) provides policy guidance on incorporating urban water valuation to alleviate pressure on water resources and maintain water quality in water-scarce regions of Asia.

EVENT

Climate Change & Water Security

Marking World Water Day, this event discussed challenges and potential solutions related to water security in the context of climate change adaptation (online; 25 March). It highlighted the central role of water in sustainable development and the pressing need to address global water security challenges. A student session explored water security issues in Ghana, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Tunisia, highlighting challenges such as uneven distribution, lack of access, pollution, inadequate infrastructure and climate change. The event was organized by UNU-IAS in partnership with the Institute for Future Initiatives (IFI) at the University of Tokyo and the UNU Water Network.

PUBLICATION

Safeguarding South-East Asia’s Marine Ecosystems from Ocean Acidification Threats



This UNU-IAS Policy Brief (No. 50, 2025) addresses the environmental and socio-economic impacts of ocean acidification in South-East Asia, a region that is particularly vulnerable to the problem. It offers recommendations for ensuring food security and economic stability by implementing

sustainable marine resource management through local community empowerment, education and collaboration across ASEAN Member States.

PUBLICATION

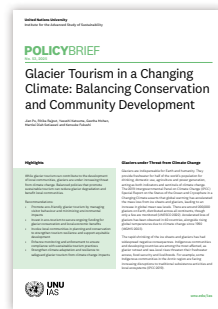
Water Unequal Exchange

Published in the scientific journal *Sustainability*, this article explores the environmental costs of textile trade between high-income and low-income countries. It focuses on textile dye production, which requires large amounts of water and chemicals, generating substantial wastewater and placing significant burdens on local environments and water resources. Analysing the case of Bangladesh, it finds that the country’s textile trade to the European Union and the United

States of America is a case of unequal exchange, whereby Bangladesh is disproportionately internalizing resource over-extraction and environmental impacts from dye production for low economic gains. The article was authored by a UNU-IAS researcher and a UNU-IAS PhD student, and published in the journal *Sustainability*. (Full title: Water Unequal Exchange: Embedded Groundwater, Chemicals, and Wastewater in Textile Trade from Bangladesh to the EU and the USA, 2000–2023.)

PUBLICATION

Glacier Tourism in a Changing Climate



While glacier tourism can contribute to the development of local communities, it also places pressure on surrounding ecosystems. At the same time, glaciers are under increasing threat from climate change. This UNU-IAS Policy Brief (No. 53, 2025) identifies practical approaches for more sustainable

forms of glacier tourism, calling for coordinated policy action, stronger local engagement and integrated governance to ensure long-term resilience and equitable development in glacier-dependent regions.





Innovation & Education

POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (RCEs)

The Global RCE Network comprises 200 RCEs across world — local hubs promoting education for sustainable development through multi-stakeholder collaboration. UNU-IAS supports and coordinates these efforts as the network’s secretariat, scaling up its knowledge and best practices to advance the global education for sustainable development (ESD) agenda. During 2025 three new centres joined the network: RCE East Java (Indonesia), RCE Mongolia and RCE Shanghai (China).



The 14th Global RCE Conference was held in Okayama, Japan with the theme “Rethinking Learning for a Sustainable Future: 20 Years of Action and Innovation” (21–23 October). It brought together more than 260 RCE representatives and key stakeholders to celebrate the network’s 20th anniversary, at the midpoint of the RCE Roadmap

2021–2030 and the ESD for 2030 framework. The conference reflected on the network’s accomplishments and its efforts to advance SDG 4 (quality education). The 2025 Okayama Declaration was adopted, reaffirming the network’s commitment to harnessing education as a driver of systemic transformation in addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, inequality, digital disruption, and threats to peace and well-being. The conference also launched the UNU-IAS book *Learning, Collaborating and Transforming: The 20-Year Journey of the Global RCE Network*, which highlights the historical work of RCEs to strengthen individual capacities and transform communities, policies and learning systems.

The annual RCE Awards recognized 61 outstanding RCE projects — including 24 led by youth — on themes such as biodiversity protection, climate action, cultural heritage, digital innovation and transformative learning

environments. At the national level, the Japan RCE Youth Meeting 2025 was held in Kitakyushu City, engaging 23 young leaders from five RCEs across the country (10–11 February). Outcomes from the meeting were published by RCE youth members as a guidebook that highlights local practices contributing to well-being.



POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI)

During 2024–2025 UNU co-chaired HESI, an open partnership enhancing the role of the higher education sector in sustainable development. Together with the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education (UNESCO IESALC), UNU-IAS leads the HESI Action Group on the Futures of Higher Education and Artificial Intelligence. The group serves as a platform to build the knowledge base on AI in higher education through the lens of sustainable development. In this role UNU-IAS produced the podcast *AI and Sustainability* and the *AI Learning Lab* webinar series (see pg. 11–12), which showcased the potential of AI to enhance university research, management and administration. The 2025 HESI Global Forum, a Special Event of the 2025 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF; see pg. 8) addressed growing inequality and the role of higher education in driving inclusive sustainable development. The forum introduced the HESI Partnership Framework, which will coordinate efforts across teaching and learning, research and innovation, and partnerships and engagement.

PUBLICATION

Learning for a Sustainable Future: RCE Stories of Action-Oriented Pedagogy



This UNU-IAS publication presents 10 case studies from RCEs across the world, illustrating how action-oriented teaching approaches can empower people of all ages to contribute towards a more sustainable future. They highlight participatory and experiential approaches that build sustainability skills and encourage

learners to take action.

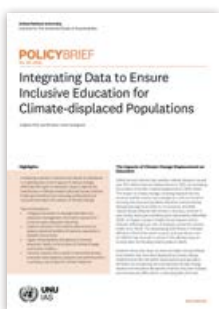
POLICY ENGAGEMENT

ESD for 2030

As part of the ESD-Net 2030 Learning Webinar series, UNU-IAS and UNESCO hosted a webinar on action-oriented pedagogy for ESD (27 May), connecting more than 180 educators, policymakers and practitioners. The session introduced the UNU-IAS action-oriented pedagogy framework as a practical approach to help learners translate sustainability knowledge into meaningful action. RCEs presented concrete examples, and interactive sessions explored how the framework can strengthen learner agency and support effective ESD implementation in diverse contexts. UNU-IAS serves as co-coordinator of the UNESCO Greening Education Partnership.

PUBLICATION

Integrating Data to Ensure Inclusive Education for Climate-displaced Populations



This UNU-IAS Policy Brief (No. 49, 2025) addresses the urgent need to integrate education and climate-related data to support learners displaced by climate impacts. It provides recommendations on strengthening crisis-sensitive education planning, using innovative and predictive data

sources to anticipate learner displacement, and ensuring data-informed policy development for climate-resilient education systems.

PROJECT

Climate Change Education for All: Building Teacher Readiness for Climate Literacy

This three-year project was launched, aiming to develop a climate change literacy framework for teachers that enables global core competencies to be tailored to national contexts. In collaboration with UNESCO New Delhi, the framework will be piloted through teacher training programmes in the Maldives and Sri Lanka, and lead to the launch of a new UNU-IAS Diploma for Global Climate Change Educator in 2027. The project is funded by the Korea Environment Corporation (K-eco).

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

RCE Regional Trainings on Action-Oriented Pedagogies for ESD

A series of four UNU-IAS capacity building workshops was held online during September–November, engaging a total of 187 participants from RCEs in a diverse range of educational contexts. Each workshop focused on one RCE region (Africa and the Middle East, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe), introducing practical, action-oriented teaching approaches to help educators connect learning with real-world sustainability challenges. The training also launched an educator toolkit that provides easy-to-use resources supporting hands-on, community-focused learning.

EVENT

2025 ProSPER.Net Sustainability Forum

On World Environment Day (5 June), this forum explored the role of higher education institutions in the Asia-Pacific region as drivers of long-term environmental change. Under the theme EcoSmart Universities: Pioneering Sustainability for Future Generations, scholars and practitioners shared practical examples on greening campuses, implementing circular economy approaches, promoting environmental consciousness in academic communities, and integrating circular economy concepts in teaching, research and campus activities.

Capacity Development & Training

Global Leadership Training Programme in Africa (GLTP)

This initiative facilitates knowledge exchange between Japan and Africa to contribute towards solving sustainable development challenges on the continent. Implemented as an intensive online course for postgraduate students and practitioners, it enhances leadership skills such as creativity and self-reflection to analyse complex and interrelated challenges in Africa from both global and local perspectives. The 2026 course trained 18 participants from 14 countries (online; 6 January – 9 February), in collaboration with New York University and the University of Johannesburg. The programme is supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan (MEXT).

UNU-IAS organized a Thematic Session at the Ninth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 9) in Yokohama, which showcased GLTP (21 August). Focusing on the theme Accelerating Sustainable Development in Africa: Perspectives from Future Leaders, it featured GLTP participants reflecting on their learnings and experiences in the course, and how they had contributed to their current work. A panel discussion explored the unique features of GLTP, including interdisciplinary and community-based research approaches.



41st UNU Global Seminar

This seminar series has been organized by UNU since 1985, with the aim of enhancing awareness among students about contemporary global issues and the role of the United Nations in addressing them. UNU-IAS organized the 41st session in Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan (10–13 August), with the support of MEXT and the Japan Foundation for the United Nations University (JFUNU). Focusing on the topic Living with the Climate Crisis: Learning Resilience and Innovation from Noto, Kanazawa and Hakusan, the seminar engaged 30 university students from 12 countries, including 12 participants from developing countries. It reflected lessons from the aftermath of the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake and torrential rain disasters, and introduced rural sustainability challenges with global relevance. Participants explored the interconnectedness of urban nature and culture in Kanazawa City, and learned about creative reconstruction, biocultural diversity and the use of local resources at the Mount Hakusan UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and the Hakusan Tedorigawa UNESCO Global Geopark. Guest lecturers provided insights from disaster-affected areas of the Noto Peninsula. The seminar included lectures, field visits and group work, and supported networking between students from different universities and academic backgrounds.

Net Zero 101: What, Why and How

This free e-learning course introduces key concepts of climate science and practical steps that individuals can take for climate action. Since launching in June 2024 the course has attracted more than 30,000 enrolments, with more than 16,000 certificates issued. It bridges urgent gaps in climate education, with more than 80% of participants based in the Global South.

Developed by UNU-IAS in collaboration with UNITAR, the course simplifies complex concepts into actionable knowledge. The course is delivered through the One UN Climate Change Learning Partnership (UN CC:Learn) platform, and has been shared through other learning resource hubs such as SDG:Learn and the SEAMEO Resource Centre. The course was developed by UNU-IAS as part of its K-eco Global Net Zero Partnership (K-GNP)

project, with support from the Ministry of Environment of Japan and the Korea Environment Corporation (K-eco), Government of the Republic of Korea.

SDG-Universities Platform (SDG-UP)

Through this initiative UNU-IAS mobilized efforts by 22 Japanese universities towards achieving the SDGs, strengthening local and international collaboration and exchange of good practices. The 2025 SDG-UP Public Symposium (Tokyo, 27 March) engaged university administrators, professors, students and government officials to discuss how Japanese universities could advance the SDGs through education, research and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Each SDG-UP working group shared its activities, and students from participating universities introduced their activities to promote sustainability on campus. During 2025 seven SDG-UP Workshops were organized, including three featuring international guest speakers. An SDGs curriculum, Introduction to the UN SDGs, has been jointly developed and delivered by SDG-UP member universities. The platform organized an online event (26 July) in which students who completed the course in the Spring 2025 semester shared and discussed their learning experiences. SDG-UP is supported by MEXT.



GIAHS International Study Programme

This programme provides students with in-depth understanding of agricultural systems and UN efforts to address global food issues, focusing on the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage (GIAHS) initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Recognizing that the Noto region

of Ishikawa Prefecture was one of the first areas in Japan to be designated as a GIAHS (2011), the 2025 programme focused specifically on supporting recovery in Noto following the 2024 earthquake and subsequent heavy rainfall, through international field-based learning on traditional agricultural systems and resilient recovery from the disasters. Through the programme five university students from Ishikawa Prefecture undertook a field visit to Rome and Umbria, Italy (2–8 September). They visited the headquarters of FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and WFP, and presented insights on sustainable food culture in the Noto region, traditional knowledge and disaster recovery efforts. At a GIAHS site in Umbria — Olive Groves of the Slopes between Assisi and Spoleto — the students learned about sustainable agriculture and branding.

JSPS-UNU Postdoctoral Fellowship

This initiative provides young scholars and policymakers, especially those from the developing world, with opportunities to pursue advanced research and training aligned with the thematic areas of UNU-IAS. The 24-month fellowships are jointly organized by UNU-IAS and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). Fellows participate in UNU-IAS lectures, seminars, workshops and conferences, and benefit from the institute's close links with key universities and think tanks in Japan and around the world. During 2025 fellows conducted research on a wide range of topics including land use and urbanization, just energy transition in Africa, urban watershed management in Asia and inclusive learning technologies in higher education.

International Seminar Series on Sustainability

This seminar engaged 47 high school students from across Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan in lectures, presentations and interactive sessions (online, 6–7 February). Students learned about the work of UNU-IAS and explored a variety of topics related to sustainability while developing their English comprehension and presentation skills. The seminar was organized by JFUNU and Ibaraki Prefectural Board of Education in collaboration with UNU-IAS.

Postgraduate Education

UNU-IAS educates the policymakers and researchers of tomorrow through postgraduate degrees and courses that develop the knowledge and adaptive capabilities needed for a more sustainable global future. The institute offers master's and PhD degree programmes, and short intensive courses conducted in collaboration with leading universities in Japan and other countries.

Students and fellows benefit from the unique learning environment of a global university within the UN system, with access to leading scholars and practitioners, as well as international events. Active engagement in UNU-IAS research projects develops applied skills, while networks and partner institutions provide opportunities for field experience in developing countries. The institute's location in central Tokyo, at the heart of the city's international community, brings a wide variety of enriching educational and cultural experiences. During 2025 the unique opportunities available to UNU-IAS students included an interactive dialogue with His Excellency Mr. Philémon Yang, the President of the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly (1 February), and a private tea reception with Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan (see pg. 8).

A range of scholarships are provided to support outstanding students, from the Asian Development Bank, the Japan Foundation for the UNU (JFNU), Mizuho International Foundation, Resona Bank and the UNU Rector's Office. Academic cooperation and student exchange agreements enable the transfer of credits with Japanese universities — International Christian University (ICU), the University of Tokyo (UTokyo), Sophia University and Waseda University Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies. Through these schemes UNU-IAS students have access to 521 relevant courses at partner universities. UNU-IAS has also been implementing joint diploma programmes with Sophia University and UTokyo. A new fast-track initiative was established in 2024, enabling applicants who hold a master's degree from Sophia University to obtain an MSc at UNU-IAS in as little as one year.

In 2025 four students became the first recipients of the UNU-IAS Diploma Programme for Specialization on the Paris Agreement, which strengthens national capacity to implement the Paris Agreement on climate change. It includes two intensive practicum courses, which are also available to external students. The programme, which was launched in September 2023, has been featured prominently at recent UN Climate Change Conferences including UNFCCC COP30 (see pg. 18).

28 students from **18** countries

71% from developing countries

50% female, **50%** male

61% supported by scholarships



Learning Journeys

The diverse student body of UNU-IAS reflects the institute's global focus, and its aim of making a strong and lasting impact in local communities and around the world. Below, three students describe in their own words how studying at UNU-IAS is advancing their learning journeys towards careers as sustainability leaders.



Ritika Rajput

PhD Student, India

"I was attracted to the programme's strong emphasis on integrating science, policy and practice, which aligns closely with my academic interests and my goal of producing research that has real-world impact.

Apart from gaining specialization in my research field, the PhD programme helped me develop an interdisciplinary understanding of sustainability. The programme is truly 'transdisciplinary' in nature. The learning environment is highly conducive and supportive. The courses offered in the programme have helped me develop practical skills, such as GIS and statistical analysis, which I can effectively utilize in my professional life.

I want to continue contributing to both the academic and policy spheres through my academic writing. I believe that the skills and training I have gained during my PhD have equipped me to effectively take on professional challenges and to contribute meaningfully to sustainability-focused research and policy initiatives."



James Alidzi Gbeku

MSc Student, Ghana

"I joined the programme because it aligns closely with my background in development planning and my strong commitment to sustainable development. I was drawn to UNU-IAS because of its strong connection to the United Nations and its global approach to addressing sustainability challenges.

The programme has broadened my global perspective on sustainability and strengthened my research focus, particularly in agroecology in Ghana. The learning environment is inclusive and diverse, and the interdisciplinary courses encourage active participation and critical thinking.

I aim to pursue a career in academia, and UNU-IAS is preparing me through strong research training and exposure to global sustainability scholarship."



Pauline Robert

MSc Student, France

"I decided to join the Master of Science in Sustainability programme to expand my knowledge of education in sustainable development. I was also attracted by the diversity of courses offered across different tracks, such as water, biodiversity and governance.

My lab, Innovation and Education, allows us a great deal of autonomy and exploration of various topics, and provides spaces for discovery and discussion that are very enriching. Outside of the curriculum, we also have the incredible opportunity to meet key actors in sustainable development in Japan and experience Japanese culture.

I wish to continue dedicating my career to serving the common good, preserving the planet, and passing on knowledge, ideally within the United Nations."

Knowledge Transfer & Communications

- Publications ▶ pg. 31
- In the News ▶ pg. 32
- Voices of UNU-IAS ▶ pg. 34



Publications

UNU-IAS researchers produced 68 publications during 2025, including 53 articles in peer-reviewed scientific journals, as well as policy briefs, working papers, books, book chapters, online articles and conference papers.

UNU-IAS Policy Briefs

This series presents analysis and policy recommendations for addressing sustainability challenges, in an accessible format. Each brief informs high-level debates, enhances research uptake and provides actionable recommendations for decision makers at the global, national and local levels. Five were published during 2025:

- Integrating Data to Ensure Inclusive Education for Climate-displaced Populations (No. 49)
- Safeguarding South-East Asia's Marine Ecosystems from Ocean Acidification Threats (No. 50)
- Advancing a Just Energy Transition for Low- and Middle-income Economies: The Role of the G7 (No. 51)
- Promoting Water Valuation for Urban Sustainable Development in Asia (No. 52)
- Glacier Tourism in a Changing Climate: Balancing Conservation and Community Development (No. 53)

Books

Recent books produced by UNU-IAS researchers include:

- *Business and Biodiversity: Reciprocal Connections in the Context of Socio-Ecological Production Landscapes and Seascapes (SEPLS)* (Springer, 2025)
- *Remotely Sensed Rivers in the Age of Anthropocene* (Springer, March 2025)
- *Food Systems and Biodiversity in the Context of Environmental and Climate Risks* (Springer, August 2025)
- *Learning for a Sustainable Future: RCE Stories of Action-Oriented Pedagogy* (UNU-IAS, October 2025)
- *Advancing Education through Local Action and Partnerships: 20 Years of Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development* (UNU-IAS, October 2025)

In the News

UNU-IAS advances global debate on sustainability through expert commentary in the media, providing insights on current events and emerging sustainability issues. Our interviews, op-eds and original articles inform public understanding and influence policy discourse by explaining the latest research and policy recommendations.

From Aid to Investment: Reimagining TICAD

The Japan News, 20 August

Authored by João Filipe Papel (JSPS-UNU Postdoctoral Fellow), this op-ed called for a bold reimagining of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD; see pg. 8).



Symposium on Noto Peninsula Recovery

Hokuriku Chunichi Shimbun, 21 March

This article featured a UNU-IAS symposium on recovery efforts on the Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan, following the 2024 Noto Earthquake (see pg. 15).



Plastic Pollution Treaty Should Embrace Circular Economy Education

Down to Earth, 6 January

In this editorial piece, Anupam Khajuria (Research Fellow and Academic Associate) and Nana Zhao (Assistant Director, Basel Convention Regional Center for Asia and the Pacific) reflected on the progress of international negotiations to develop a binding agreement on tackling plastic pollution.

To Solve Climate Crisis, Change How We Learn About It

Diplomatic Courier, 12 November

Published as part of an expert commentary series on the 2025 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP30), this op-ed by Nafissa Insebayeva (Consultant) highlighted the importance of action-oriented, community-based climate education that empowers learners.

The Resilience of Small Islands: Protecting the Natural Capital of Pari Island, Indonesia

Green Network Asia, 23 April

This op-ed by Martiwi Diah Setiawati (Research Fellow and Academic Associate) discussed climate resilience and the protection of natural capital in Pari Island, Indonesia.

UNU-IAS Experts Discuss Ecosystem Restoration

Nippon TV, 13 July

Nippon Television featured a field visit by UNU-IAS experts to *Kagaku no Sato*, a project led by the science education TV programme “Tokoro-san no Megaten!” and the International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative (IPSI; see pg. 20).



Working with Students to Solve International Problems

Yomiuri Shimbun, 12 January

This article outlined the career path of Prof. Shinobu Yume Yamaguchi (Director, UNU-IAS) and introduced the institute’s mandate and activities.



Ending Exclusion Begins with Inclusive Education in Japan

Japan Today, 17 December

Published for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December), this op-ed by Jonghwi Park (Academic Programme Officer) explored how inclusive education from early life can help to end the exclusion of persons with disabilities.

Built-in Bias: Why Education and Diversity in AI Matter

UN Today, 1 February

Authored by Jerome Silla (Research Associate), this article explored biases and discrimination in AI systems.



Voices of UNU-IAS

UNU-IAS fosters online dialogue on critical issues influencing the global community. In 2025 our experts, students and alumni shared insights that informed, engaged and connected audiences on social media. This page features a selection of these insights from UNU-IAS channels.

Follow UNU-IAS ▼
unu-ias.start.page

International Day of Education

24 January



"I study how young people engage with local culture to improve intangible cultural heritage education, hoping to drive innovation while preserving Indigenous knowledge for the future."



Kenna Lee Edler, PhD student



"Education for sustainable development works best when focused on participation and action. My research shows this approach can build practical skills, especially if courses reflect local social and cultural contexts that make learning meaningful and effective."



Anna Saakwor Batsa, PhD student

International Women's Day — For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment

8 March



Women are at the heart of climate solutions. Let's make sure their voices are heard and they have the power to lead a fair, sustainable future."



Muhammad Afaq
MSc Student
UNU-IAS



Investing in women's rights and education empowers them to unlock their potential to lead change toward responsible consumption, circular approaches and a more sustainable world."



Anupam Khajuria
Research Fellow and
Academic Associate
UNU-IAS



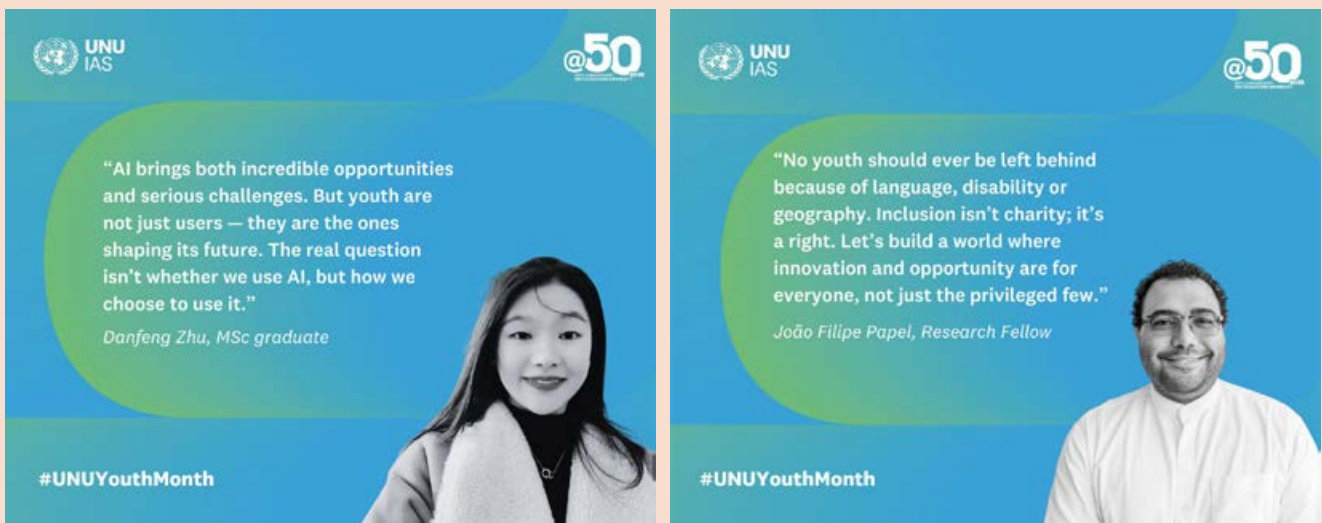
Alumni Voices — #UNUat50

September – October



International Youth Day — #UNUYouthMonth

12 August



About UNU-IAS

The United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS) is a research and teaching institute dedicated to realizing a sustainable future for people and our planet. Based in Tokyo, Japan, UNU-IAS serves the international community by producing evidence-based knowledge and solutions to inform policymaking and address priority issues for the UN system.

Through policy-oriented research and capacity development the institute drives progress in four thematic areas: governance for climate change and sustainable development, biodiversity & society, water & resource management, and innovation & education. UNU-IAS creates new value by integrating expertise across these areas, in both academia and policymaking, to mobilize knowledge for sustainability and advance the global effort to achieve the SDGs by 2030. It applies innovative approaches and research methods to challenge conventional thinking and develop creative

solutions to emerging issues of global concern. The institute's research, education and training engage a global network of scholars and partner institutions, driving interconnectedness between policymakers and the science and academic communities to realize sustainable solutions. Through field-based research, including an operating unit in Kanazawa City (Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan), UNU-IAS is developing models for localizing the SDGs and other global agendas by building multi-stakeholder partnerships.

UNU-IAS postgraduate education advances the broader transformation towards sustainability in society — producing the policymakers and researchers of tomorrow, who will be at the forefront of global efforts for sustainability. The institute offers master's and doctoral degrees, postdoctoral fellowships and innovative short courses, in close collaboration with leading universities in Japan and other countries.

Thematic Areas

Governance for Climate Change & Sustainable Development

Sustainability depends on translating into practice the global vision of the SDGs, the Paris Agreement on climate change and other related agendas, ensuring their effective implementation. UNU-IAS mobilizes knowledge, expertise and partnerships to strengthen governance and policymaking processes for these urgent global agendas.

Water & Resource Management

Water is at the core of sustainable development, linking livelihoods, health, ecosystems and infrastructure. Ensuring access to clean water and sanitation for all requires a transformation in the way we manage water resources. UNU-IAS is developing sustainable, decentralized approaches to overcome the water crisis, enhance resilience and help build decarbonized, circular economies.

Biodiversity & Society

Action on biodiversity is urgently needed to sustain a healthy planet and the lives that it supports. UNU-IAS advances human-environment solutions to accelerate transformational change toward living in harmony with nature. The institute's research provides evidence-based inputs for implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, with a focus on sustainable management of production landscapes and seascapes.

Innovation & Education

Building more sustainable societies relies fundamentally on fostering creative, innovative solutions and empowering individuals through education. UNU-IAS accelerates knowledge generation and lifelong learning for a sustainability transformation, through policy-oriented research, capacity development and partnerships.

An Institute of the United Nations University

UNU-IAS is an institute of the United Nations University (UNU) with a specific mandate to address sustainability issues. UNU is a global think tank and postgraduate teaching organization comprising 13 institutes, located in 12 different countries.

Organization

UNU-IAS was inaugurated on 1 January 2014. The institute is based at the global headquarters of UNU in Tokyo, and it has an operating unit located in Kanazawa City in Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan (UNU-IAS OUIK).

Global Environment Outreach Centre (GEOC)

This joint initiative of UNU-IAS and the Ministry of the Environment, Japan (MOEJ) supports on-the-ground activities and multi-stakeholder partnerships in various social sectors towards sustainable societies within and beyond Japan. It plays an important role in UNU-IAS communications, outreach and knowledge management.

During 2025 GEOC engaged public audiences through exhibitions, symposiums and dialogues, and addressed key issues such as recovery efforts in Noto, meaningful youth participation and local SDG actions. By operating public facilities at UNU headquarters in Tokyo, GEOC actively disseminated information and ensured public engagement in critical global issues, including climate change and biodiversity. During 2025 the center received more than 16,000 visitors.

Staffing

As of December 2025, UNU-IAS had a staff of 60, comprising nationals of 21 different countries. Women constituted 72% of UNU-IAS staff. UNU-IAS is committed to achieving gender balance and ensuring gender equality. UNU employment practices also strive to ensure equality of opportunity and treatment for persons with disabilities and to prevent any form of disability-based exclusion or discrimination.

Board

The role of the UNU-IAS Board is to provide guidance on the strategic orientation of the institute and its academic and policy work, and ensure scientific excellence. The Board advises on management issues such as budgeting and staffing, and reviews the institute's activity reports, strategic plans and work programmes. The 2025 meeting of the Board was held at UNU-IAS in Tokyo on 11–12 November.

UNU-IAS Board Members

As of December 2025

Dr. Melissa Brown (USA)

Deputy Director, MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies, Yale University

Mr. Mitsuo Kojima (Japan)

Representative Director, MetLife Investment Management Japan, Ltd.

Dr. Philip Osano (Kenya) CHAIR

Centre Director, Stockholm Environment Institute Africa

Dr. Smitta Premchander (India)

Founder and Secretary, Sampark; Visiting Faculty, Indian Institute of Management

Members of the UNU-IAS Board serve in their individual capacity, and are appointed by the Rector of UNU, in consultation with the UNU Council. The Rector of UNU and the Director of UNU-IAS are *ex-officio* members of the Board.

Financing

UNU-IAS is financed entirely by voluntary contributions from governments, agencies, international organizations and other sources.

Financial Support

Contributions during 2025 over USD 20,000

- AEON Environmental Foundation
- Asian Development Bank
- Ishikawa Prefecture
- Government of Japan — Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)
- Government of Japan — Ministry of the Environment (MOEJ)
- Japan Foundation for UNU (JFUNU)
- Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS)
- Kanazawa City
- Korea Environment Corporation (K-eco)
- Resona Holdings, Inc

End of Report

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Pg. 10	Arpan Basu Chowdhury / UNESCO-UNEVOC	Pg. 26	Hanna Takemoto / UNU-IAS
Pg. 11	top: UNU-IAS / Canva (AI generated)	Pg. 27	Anne Lecroq / UNU-IAS
Pg. 11	bottom: UNU Macau	Pg. 28	Hanna Takemoto / UNU-IAS
Pg. 12	Avelino Jr Meija / UNU-IAS	Pg. 29	UNU-IAS
Pg. 13	Christian Brauneck / UNU-IAS	Pg. 30	Hanna Takemoto / UNU-IAS
Pg. 14	Nicholas Turner / UNU-IAS	Pg. 32	left: courtesy of <i>The Japan News</i>
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Pg. 17	Tom Fisk / Pexels	Pg. 34–35:	UNU-IAS
Pg. 18	Cheryl Baldicantos / ILO		

United Nations University

Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability

5-53-70 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-8925 Japan

Tel: +81 3 5467 1212

unu.edu/ias

UNU is committed to the ideals and practices of environmental sustainability, and is an ISO140001 certified institution.

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THE GLOBAL GOALS
For Sustainable Development