

# Annual Report 2023



UNU  
IAS

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# Director's Message

2023 was the warmest year on record, by far. Biodiversity loss accelerated, while worsening pollution claimed millions of lives across the globe. Resolving this triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution requires concerted global cooperation and ambitious action to deliver science-based solutions.

The year saw important steps forward in multilateral processes for sustainability. At the halfway point of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Member States recognized that progress was far off track and committed to accelerate action on all 17 goals. Agreements were reached on crucial priorities such as transitioning away from fossil fuels and building a water-secure future.

By advancing scientific knowledge, informing policymaking and enhancing capacities, UNU-IAS helped to drive global progress across the sustainable development agenda. At the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) we organized a series of side events discussing biodiversity, COVID-19 recovery, climate-SDG synergies and higher education. Working with UN partners, we contributed expertise to the Fourth Global Climate & SDG Synergy Conference and a groundbreaking report on win-win solutions for climate and sustainable development. Our engagement at the 2023 SDG Summit, held during the UN General Assembly, advanced discussions on harnessing science and collaboration in postgraduate education.

Ahead of the G7 Hiroshima Summit, UNU-IAS played a pivotal role in the Think7 Japan Summit, which provided policy solutions for reigniting sustainable development. We co-chaired the summit's Task Force on Wellbeing, Environmental Sustainability, and Just Transition, which produced an Issue Paper and four policy briefs. Follow-up policy dialogues were held in Berlin, Kigali and New York.

At the UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai we provided science-based inputs on critical topics such as just transition, climate-SDG synergies and the rights of people displaced by climate change. UNU-IAS organized seven side events and our experts featured in many more, as well as policy dialogues and prominent media articles.

The UN 2023 Water Conference in New York was the first such event convened by the United Nations in four decades. UNU-IAS organized two side events and launched a new partnership for urban water sustainability. We also concluded a research project on wastewater reuse, which developed a mechanism for companies to integrate smart reuse techniques into their value chains.

The International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative (IPSI) grew to more than 300 members, and in July we convened the partnership in person for the first time in four years. Held in Akita, Japan, the Ninth IPSI Global Conference adopted a new strategy and action plan aligned with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. We also published a practical guide to assist policymakers in developing the national biodiversity plans that will implement the new global framework.

The institute continued to develop local capacity for sustainability in the Asia-Pacific region. Through the Mayors Academy for Sustainable Urban Development we delivered ten training modules, each engaging up to 25 mayors, in collaboration with UN and other partners. We developed national capacity for the Paris Agreement through training of government officials and youth in Bangkok. Our SDG-Universities Platform (SDG-UP) further strengthened collaboration between 29 Japanese universities for the SDGs, holding six workshops and a public symposium. The UNU-IAS Operating Unit in Kanazawa, Ishikawa (OUIK) advanced nature-based solutions with local partners, and contributed to UNEP recognizing Kanazawa City as one of 11 Role Model Cities for ecosystem restoration.

In December UNU co-hosted an important UNESCO conference focused on education for sustainable development (ESD). As part of this ESD-NET 2030 Global Meeting, UNU-IAS organized a key session highlighting the transformative potential of local collaboration and action-oriented learning.

We welcomed 11 new students from ten different countries, who began their learning journeys in our master's and doctoral programmes in September. They include the first cohort of our new specialization on the Paris Agreement — a flagship initiative to train the climate leaders of tomorrow. We will soon expand access to these courses as a standalone diploma for participants from businesses, governments and civil society.

The institute's publications included articles in prominent scientific journals such as *Nature*, *Science* and *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*. We published books on ecosystem restoration, climate change displacement and the right to education, and sustainable consumption and production. UNU-IAS Policy Briefs provided actionable recommendations on carbon neutrality strategies, climate action in Africa, education rights for displaced persons, climate finance gaps in developing countries and landscape approaches to ecosystem restoration.

These are only a few highlights from the many activities and achievements of UNU-IAS during 2023. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all of our partners, donors and other supporters for your collaboration and commitment.

As we enter the home straight for the SDGs, we must all redouble our efforts to deliver on the promises of the 2030 Agenda. I look forward to working with you this year and beyond to create a more sustainable future and overcome the urgent crises threatening life on our planet.

**Shinobu (Yume) Yamaguchi**  
Director, UNU-IAS



# Across the Globe

## Europe

### Events

Dresden, GERMANY

### Presentations & Lectures

Paris, FRANCE

Nijmegen, NETHERLANDS

Cambridge, UK

## Africa

### Events

Nairobi, KENYA

Dakar, SENEGAL

### Presentations & Lectures

Nairobi, KENYA

## Asia (other) & Oceania

### Events

Siem Reap, CAMBODIA

Suwon, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Tongyeong, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Johor Bahru, MALAYSIA

Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

Bangkok, THAILAND

Dubai, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

### Presentations & Lectures

Sydney, AUSTRALIA

Phnom Penh, CAMBODIA

Lishui, CHINA

Macau, CHINA

Suzhou, CHINA

Taipei, CHINA

Bali, INDONESIA

Daegu, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Incheon, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Tongyeong, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Luang Prabang, LAO PEOPLE'S  
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Ulaanbaatar, MONGOLIA

Singapore, SINGAPORE

Bangkok, THAILAND

Nakorn Pathom, THAILAND

Pattaya, THAILAND

Pathumthani, THAILAND

Abu Dhabi, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

### Research Fieldwork

Delhi, INDIA

Gurugram, INDIA

Barito Kuala Regency, INDONESIA

Luang Prabang, LAO PEOPLE'S

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Penang, MALAYSIA

Angat, PHILIPPINES

Claveria, PHILIPPINES

Pasig City, PHILIPPINES

**237**  
Activities

**22**  
Countries

**12,181**  
Event Participants

## Japan

### Events

Akita  
Kanazawa  
Kobe  
Nanao  
Nagakute  
Noto  
Tokyo  
Wajima

### Presentations & Lectures

Tokyo  
Fukushima City  
Kanazawa  
Nagoya  
Nanao  
Nonoichi  
Toyama City  
Yokohama

### Research Fieldwork

Kitakyushu  
Noto

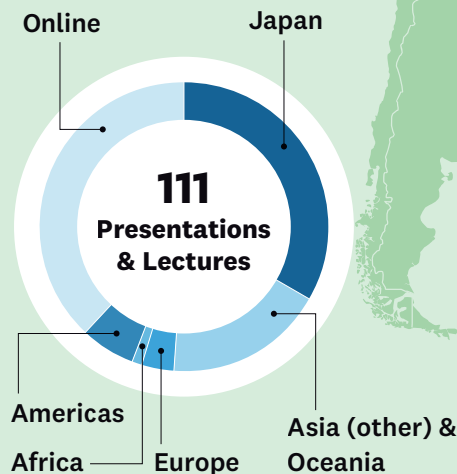
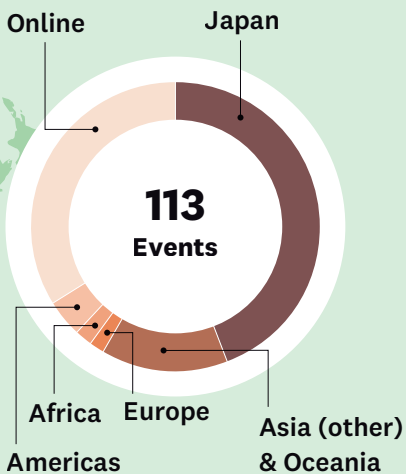
## Americas

### Events

Atlanta, USA  
New York, USA

### Presentations & Lectures

Montreal, CANADA  
Atlanta, USA  
New York, USA  
Portland, USA





## Features

# Half-Time for the SDGs

2023 marked the halfway point in the global journey towards the SDGs. But with only seven years left until the 2030 deadline, progress on many of the goals has stalled or even reversed. Interlinked crises — from the COVID-19 pandemic to armed conflict and cost-of-living increases — have jeopardized advances on poverty, hunger, health, pollution and biodiversity.

Reviving the goals will require scaling up action across society, through integrated

policies and systemic change. We have more data on SDG progress and innovations than ever before, and leveraging scientific knowledge will be crucial to accelerate transformations to sustainable pathways. The key priorities in the second half of the 2030 Agenda will include strengthening social protection to ensure no one is left behind, and securing long-term finance to help developing economies get back on track.



UNU-IAS contributed to global policy dialogue on sustainable development throughout 2023, with a particular focus on its social dimensions and integrated solutions. The institute played a key role in developing and delivering the **Think7 Japan Summit** (27–28 April, Tokyo), which provided policy solutions to reignite sustainable development, calling for ambitious and enduring cooperation between the G7 and G20. UNU-IAS co-chaired the summit’s **Task Force on Wellbeing, Environmental Sustainability, and Just Transition**, which produced an Issue Paper (see below) and four policy briefs — including one by UNU-IAS, *Critical Minerals for Net-Zero Transition: How the G7 can Address Supply Chain Challenges and Socioenvironmental Spillovers*. The summit resulted in the Think7 Japan Communiqué, which was presented to Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan on 28 April. UNU-IAS continued this policy dialogue at further events in Berlin (15–16 May), Kigali (12–14 June), and New York (21 September).

UNU-IAS events at the **2023 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development** — the main UN platform on the SDGs — advanced discussions on climate–SDG synergies, recovery from COVID-19, biodiversity and higher education (HLPF; 10–19 July; New York). The event *Translating Evidence to Action on Climate and SDGs Synergies in Asia and Beyond* (17 July) discussed solutions to leverage synergies by identifying learning opportunities and sharing practices across regions. It was organized with the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), the Ministry of the Environment of Japan (MOEJ), and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). The *2023 Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI) Global Forum* (17 July) discussed challenges and opportunities including digitalization and artificial intelligence, featuring a keynote address by UNU Rector Prof. Tshilidzi Marwala. UNU-IAS organized a student viewing event in Tokyo, enabling the institute’s postgraduate students to participate and raise issues such as the importance of skills development in research and technology.

At the **Fourth Global Climate & SDG Synergy Conference** (16 July, New York) UNU-IAS contributed expertise focused on just transition and integrated solutions. UNU-IAS provided technical inputs for the **First Global Report on Climate and SDG Synergies**, in close collaboration with the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and UN Climate Change (UNFCCC Secretariat). Launched on 13 September, the report provides a practical framework to promote synergies and support their comprehensive assessment. Through engagement at the **2023 SDG Summit**, held during the High-Level Week of the UN General Assembly (18–19 September; New York), UNU-IAS furthered efforts to accelerate SDG progress through harnessing science and collaboration in postgraduate education.

UNU-IAS also enhanced leadership for the SDGs at the local level in the Asia-Pacific region through the **Mayors Academy for Sustainable Urban Development**, and organized diverse activities to strengthen youth empowerment. These included a session of the SDGs Youth Summit 2023 (9 September, Tokyo), which discussed challenges and opportunities for enhancing meaningful youth participation in policymaking. The **SDG–Universities Platform** mobilized efforts by 29 Japanese universities towards achieving the SDGs, through a series of workshops that exchanged good practices and developed collaboration.

### **Integrated Approach for Well-being, Environmental Sustainability, and Just Transition**



This issue paper underlines that environmental sustainability is a prerequisite to achieving other priorities of the G7 — including economic prosperity, energy security, global health and education. It sets out recommendations for integrated efforts that could be pivotal to achieve the SDGs and significantly reduce climate insecurity.



*“Sectors such as buildings, industry, and urban transport are critical from the perspective of energy efficiency and energy transition policy, as these provide the highest employment opportunities for a given investment.”*

**Ahmad Khalid**  
JSPS–UNU Postdoctoral Fellow

**Read more:** *Governance for Sustainable Development* ► pg. 15



## Features

# Strengthening Capacity for Climate Action

As the climate crisis worsens, the world remains far off track from the goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C. More countries are adopting plans to transition to a net-zero future, but greater ambition and faster action are needed. The solutions are in our hands — we already have the technology and financial tools to deeply cut emissions and build climate resilience, by transforming energy, industry, transport, food, agriculture and forestry systems.

Yet implementation remains too slow. One of the key constraints holding back progress at all levels is insufficient knowledge and technical skills. There is an urgent need to build and strengthen climate capacities in governments, businesses and beyond, through education and training. Capacity development must be at the core of global efforts to accelerate collective climate action.



During 2023 UNU-IAS strengthened climate capacities at the global, national and local levels through policy engagement and innovative training initiatives.

In September the institute launched a new **postgraduate degree specialization on the Paris Agreement**, which develops crucial skills and knowledge for its implementation. Building on the existing UNU-IAS master's and doctoral programmes, the Diploma Programme for Specialization on the Paris Agreement (SPA) aims to develop future leaders who will be at the forefront of climate action in governments, the private sector and beyond. A practicum training course, delivered in collaboration with partner organizations, provides students with hands-on experience in areas such as accounting of greenhouse gas emissions, formulating strategies for net-zero emissions and adaptation, and implementing carbon markets.

At the **UN Climate Change Conference** in Dubai (COP28; 30 November – 13 December) UNU-IAS advanced discussions on implementation of the Paris Agreement through a series of side events, policy dialogue and media commentary. Our event at the Japan Pavilion discussed strategies to address capacity gaps and identified promising opportunities for collaboration. Engaging experts from developing and developed countries, it also featured a first-year master's degree student at UNU-IAS who is pursuing the new Diploma Programme for SPA.

UNU-IAS developed climate expertise and capacity in Thailand through the project **K-eco Global Net-Zero Partnership (K-GNP)**. A workshop in Bangkok (1–3 March) trained 36 government officials to advance progress towards achieving a carbon-neutral society in the country. It delivered modules incorporating successful decarbonization approaches and evidence-based best practices from Costa Rica, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. A youth ideathon, also in Bangkok (30 August – 1 September), brought together 40 young people to learn about the role of youth in Thailand's net-zero transition through lectures, discussions and design-thinking group work.

### **Closing the Gap on City Climate Finance in Developing Countries**



This policy brief identifies how cities in developing countries can build robust capacity to access the financing they need for climate mitigation and adaptation. It offers recommendations to overcome structural barriers and unlock investments by building enabling environments at the national and local levels.

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*“Instead of seeing youth primarily as victims of climate change, we should ensure that they are properly equipped with the tools and training to be empowered as active agents of change, making them the torchbearers for our sustainable future.”*

#### **Himangana Gupta**

Research Fellow & Academic Associate





## COP28 Events & Engagement

### UNFCCC PAVILION EVENT

- *Sciences & Emerging Technologies for Resilience Building: UNESCO's Approach for a Just Transition*

### JAPAN PAVILION EVENT

- *Pathways towards Enhanced Capacity to Implement the Paris Agreement — Regional Leaders Dialogue*

### PRESS CONFERENCE

- *Training Tomorrow's Climate Leaders: A New Postgraduate Specialization from UNU-IAS*

### SDG PAVILION EVENT

- *Synergistic Approach for Environmental Sustainability and Just Transition: A Follow-up to Think-7 Summit 2023*

### THAILAND PAVILION EVENTS

- *Ensuring Human Rights for Climate Migrants and Displaced Individuals*
- *Knowledge to Action: Imperatives for Climate Change Education*

### RESILIENCE HUB EVENT

- *From Reaction to Socio-Ecological Resilience: Advancing Disaster Risk Reduction and Ecosystem Restoration Nexus for Climate Adaptation*

### OTHER ENGAGEMENT

UNU-IAS experts featured in 13 further events at the Greening Education Hub, the Thailand Pavilion, the Resilience Frontiers Pavilion and the Sri Lanka Pavilion, among others.

### MEDIA COMMENTARY

See pg. 29



### Read more:

*Governance for Sustainable Development* ▶ pg. 15

*Innovation & Education* ▶ pg. 21

*Capacity Development & Training* ▶ pg. 23

*Postgraduate Education* ▶ pg. 25



## Features

# Restoring Ecosystems for People & Planet

The world's diverse ecosystems are being damaged at an increasing rate, driven by humanity's hunger for resources. Degradation of ecosystems is harming the communities that depend on them and threatening the well-being of future generations. The loss of ecosystem services each year amounts to more than 10% of global economic output.

This damage can be prevented and reversed by interventions to support the recovery of degraded ecosystems and conserve those

that remain intact. Ecosystem restoration both safeguards the planet's resources and protects people's livelihoods. It is critical to achieving the SDGs and limiting global warming to 1.5°C, with the potential to dramatically reduce extinctions, remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and create millions of new jobs by 2030.



UNU-IAS leads UNU's contribution to the UN Decade on **Ecosystem Restoration** — a broad-based global movement launched in 2021 to protect and revive ecosystems. The institute has been advancing research and capacity development on sustainability in production landscapes and seascapes, water management, and integration of conservation and biocultural values into urban planning in large metropolitan areas.

In September UNU-IAS published an open-access book that provides valuable insights on how to prevent loss and degradation of ecosystems and ensure their recovery. **Ecosystem Restoration through Managing Socio-Ecological Production Landscapes and Seascapes (SEPLS)** presents successful approaches from 12 case studies across the globe (Springer, 2023). Compiled from the International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative (IPSI; see pg. 17), the cases offer rich evidence to guide restoration efforts and advance scientific knowledge. UNU-IAS produced a policy brief (No. 44) based on the research findings and mobilized this knowledge to inform policy dialogue under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in October. The institute's side event at the 25th meeting of the **CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 25)** in Nairobi showcased these successful restoration approaches. Participants urged the adoption of effective restoration measures and the exchange of knowledge and experiences to safeguard the planet's biodiversity.

UNU-IAS has also been developing local models for ecosystem restoration through research and policy engagement by our unit located in Kanazawa, Japan. The **UNU-IAS Operating Unit Ishikawa/Kanazawa (OUK)** works closely with the governments of Kanazawa City and Ishikawa Prefecture and other

local stakeholders on nature-based solutions such as sustainable green infrastructure. These efforts contributed to UNEP selecting Kanazawa as one of 11 Role Model Cities under its **#GenerationRestoration** initiative on 31 October, recognizing the city's successful efforts to restore its relationship with nature. UNU-IAS is supporting the project by mobilizing this knowledge to support restoration of urban ecosystems worldwide.

### RCE Youth Art Challenge Exhibition

UNU-IAS organized the RCE Youth Art Challenge Exhibition (15 May – 15 July 2023), featuring artwork by young people from around the world. The exhibition, which attracted more than 2,900 visitors, spotlighted



species, habitats and ecosystems in need of protection and actions that can be taken to conserve biodiversity.

### Advancing Forest Landscape Restoration in the Tropics



This policy report explores how forest landscape restoration has rejuvenated degraded ecosystems and improved human well-being in the tropics. Based on analysis of 14 projects funded by the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), it stresses the need to embed principles of equity in programmes, including gender-sensitive plans. The report was published by UNU-IAS and the ITTO in November.



*“Citizens have to actively collaborate to conserve the nature that exists in cities. All of us gain benefits from it so we all have a responsibility to maintain the new green commons.”*

**Juan Pastor-Ivars**  
Research Associate

#### Read more:

*Biodiversity & Society* ▶ pg. 17 | *In the News* ▶ pg. 29



An aerial photograph of a rice paddy field. The field is divided into sections. On the right, there is a lush green area of mature rice. On the left and center, there is a muddy, water-filled area where several workers are planting young rice seedlings. The workers are wearing hats and are bent over, carefully placing the seedlings into the mud. The overall scene depicts traditional agricultural practices.

# Research & Policy Development

UNU-IAS generates interdisciplinary scientific knowledge to inform policymaking, advancing the global effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (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 Sustainable Development ▶ pg. 15
- Biodiversity & Society ▶ pg. 17
- Water & Resource Management ▶ pg. 19
- Innovation & Education ▶ pg. 21





# Governance for Sustainable Development

## POLICY ENGAGEMENT

### **Climate & SDG Synergies**

During 2023 UNU-IAS further developed its role as a key knowledge partner in the UN system on this crucial topic. The institute made an expert intervention at the Fourth Global Climate & SDG Synergy Conference (New York, 16 July) that emphasized the need for integrated and environmentally sustainable solutions. With 400 in-person participants and 4,000 online viewers, the conference discussed progress and approaches for transitioning towards just, equitable and climate-compatible pathways. A UNU-IAS side event at the 2023 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (see pg. 8) explored synergistic action for addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and related challenges. The event, *Translating Evidence to Action on Climate and SDGs Synergies in Asia and Beyond* (17 July), was organized with the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), the Ministry of the Environment, Japan (MOEJ), and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA).

UNU-IAS provided technical inputs for the development of the *First Global Report on Climate and SDG Synergies*, a groundbreaking publication that outlines how governments should maximize the impact of policies and actions through synergies. The report was produced by an independent expert group convened by UN DESA and UN Climate Change and launched at the 2023 SDG Summit (18–19 September, New York). Its recommendations include strengthening links between scientific evidence and applied policy action — a message that was reinforced by two UNU-IAS side events at the SDG Summit (see pg. 8). UNU-IAS also advanced policy dialogue on integrated solutions for sustainable development through the Think7 Japan Summit and follow-up events (see pg. 8).

## POLICY ENGAGEMENT

### **Mayors Academy for Sustainable Urban Development**

This initiative engages mayors across Asia and the Pacific to strengthen leadership for the SDGs and foster city-to-city collaboration. An annual training course develops capacity to implement sustainable urban solutions and provides unique peer-to-peer learning opportunities. The initiative has been implemented since 2019 with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), UN-Habitat, and other partners. UNU-IAS delivered ten online training modules during 2023, each for a group of 17–25 mayors. Nine mayors graduated in a ceremony at the 8th Asia-Pacific Urban Forum in Suwon, Republic of Korea (25 October).

## POLICY ENGAGEMENT

### **UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration**

UNU-IAS contributed to the 22nd Session of the CEPA (27–31 March), a technical advisory body that makes recommendations to improve governance and public administration for development. Held at UN headquarters in New York, the session focused on the theme *Urgently Transforming Institutions for a Greener, More Inclusive and More Resilient World at a Time of Multiple Crises*. UNU-IAS provided expert inputs through a detailed written statement and interventions during the session. These focused on the critical role of the private sector in protecting biodiversity, and the need for sub-national governments to undertake crisis budgeting, conduct fiscal optimization, develop long-term financial plans, and introduce e-government tools. These evidence-based inputs were reflected in the official report on the session, which was recognized by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC; resolution E/RES/2023/28).

## POLICY ENGAGEMENT

### 2030 Agenda Implementation in Japan

UNU-IAS further developed models and approaches for localizing the SDGs through research and policy engagement in Japan. The Sustainable Urban Nature project, implemented by the institute's Operating Unit Ishikawa/Kanazawa (OUIK), engages with diverse local stakeholders including public administrators, landowners, experts, and citizens. During 2023 surveys were conducted across five Japanese gardens and six sacred forests in Kanazawa to analyse carbon sequestration and plant biodiversity indexes, measuring over 5000 trees. The research is providing valuable evidence on how urban nature supports the city's progress on SDG 11 (sustainable cities & communities), SDG 15 (life on land), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals). Events organized by OUIK included the seminar *Tourism and the SDGs — Imagining Kanazawa's Culture and Tourism in 2030*, which explored the role of local culture in promoting sustainable tourism and regional development.

The institute promoted youth empowerment for the SDGs by co-organizing the 8th National and Regional Youth Environment Activity Contest with MOEJ and the Environmental Restoration and Conservation Agency, Japan. Eight regional contests and a national contest in Tokyo — held in person for the first time in three years — engaged more than 400 students from 85 high schools. The events enhanced skills and knowledge related to the SDGs and enabled participants to interact with UNU-IAS students. The UNU-IAS Director's Award was presented to students from Kumamoto Agricultural High School, for a project reducing emissions in the meat industry by utilizing leftover pork fat to produce laundry soap.



## RESEARCH

### Scientometric Analysis of Climate-Biodiversity Synergies

This research examined how scientific outputs have contributed to stronger links between the global climate and biodiversity agendas. UNU-IAS conducted a scientometric meta-analysis of relevant publications to shed light on how they have impacted major decisions under processes of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The findings were published in the journal *Anthropocene Science* (full title: "Climate Change and Biodiversity Synergies: A Scientometric Analysis in the Context of UNFCCC and CBD").

## PUBLICATION

### Integrating the SDGs in Policy Planning & Implementation

The report *Integrating the SDGs into Policy Planning and Implementation* was published by UNU-IAS and the Overseas Environmental Cooperation Center, Japan in July. It presents best practice for SDG integration, based on case studies of multilateral development banks such as the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation, as well as the financial mechanisms of environmental conventions such as Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility.

## POLICY BRIEF

### Accelerating Climate Action in Africa



Drawing on analysis of 2022 Voluntary National Reviews submitted by 21 African countries, this policy brief examines statistical, financial, and capacity barriers to implementing climate programmes at the national and local levels. The brief, *Accelerating Climate Action in Africa: Insights*

*from the 2022 Voluntary National Reviews* (No. 41, 2023), provides recommendations on addressing those barriers to better synergize SDG 13 (climate action) efforts and improve coordination between different levels of government.

# Biodiversity & Society



## PARTNERSHIP

### International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative (IPSI)

Through this partnership UNU-IAS advances human-environment solutions to accelerate transformational change toward living in harmony with nature. As its secretariat, the institute engages more than 300 IPSI members worldwide — from national governments and multilateral development banks to Indigenous community organizations and private companies. UNU-IAS research mobilizes knowledge from this diverse network to provide evidence-based inputs to international policy processes under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and advance implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

On 8–11 July UNU-IAS organized the Ninth IPSI Global Conference, which brought together more than 180 participants in Akita, Japan. Convening the partnership in person for the first time in four years, it shared experiences and best practices, discussing the interconnected challenges of biodiversity loss, climate change, and sustainable development, and how to enhance collective solutions. The conference adopted a new strategy and action plan for IPSI aligned with the GBF. A public forum discussed engaging young people to advance local and global conservation efforts, as part of the whole-of-society approach prioritized by the GBF (8 July). It was co-organized with the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN), Akita International University (AIU), and MOEJ.

UNU-IAS drew upon knowledge from IPSI to produce both academic and policy-oriented publications, including an open-access book and policy brief focused on innovative approaches to ecosystem restoration (see pg. 13). An IPSI funding initiative, the Satoyama Development Mechanism, supported 5 projects implemented by members of the partnership during 2023 in Bangladesh; Taiwan, China; Ethiopia; Mexico; and Viet Nam. Five new projects were selected to be implemented in Argentina, Ghana, India, and Sri Lanka.

## PUBLICATION

### Integrating Landscape Approaches in National Biodiversity Plans



This practical guide helps policymakers to incorporate landscape approaches in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) — essential instruments for countries to achieve the goals and targets of the GBF. Landscape approaches are governance strategies that

consider the ecological, social and economic context of a particular area, aiming to harmonize human activities with biodiversity conservation. Published in October, *Using Landscape Approaches in National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Planning* is based on extensive analysis of NBSAPs and a series of surveys, consultations, and workshops. It was produced by UNU-IAS and the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), based on research by UNU-IAS and the University of Tokyo Institute for Future Initiatives, with support from the CBD Secretariat and MOEJ.

## EVENT

### International Day for Biological Diversity

The global campaign on International Day for Biological Diversity 2023 focused on implementation of the GBF. UNU-IAS organized a symposium in Tokyo (15 May) that highlighted the critical role of partnerships, engaging high-level speakers including Dr. David Cooper (Acting Executive Secretary, CBD Secretariat). In Kanazawa, Japan, UNU-IAS held a special event including a tea ceremony, garden maintenance activities, and an e-bike tour to promote biological and cultural diversity (21 May).



## 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. Since 2011 it has been implemented in 20 countries across the globe, providing grants to local organizations to help maintain and rebuild socio-ecological production landscapes and seascapes (SEPLS) — areas where people have a symbiotic relationship with ecosystems. Outcomes from the project were shared at the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF; see pg. 8), through a side event co-organized by UNU-IAS on 12 July. Local practitioners from Cameroon, Nepal, and Türkiye discussed their experiences in managing SEPLS and means of scaling up landscape approaches in global and national policy. COMDEKS is implemented by UNDP, with funding from the Ministry of the Environment of Japan (MOEJ) and the Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund (KNCF), and co-financing from the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

## POLICY ENGAGEMENT

### **Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) Initiative**

UNU-IAS advanced implementation of the GIAHS Initiative of FAO through training and capacity development. The institute's Operating Unit Ishikawa/Kanazawa (OUIK) conducted a study visit for students of UNU-IAS and Japanese universities, comprising lectures and field studies focused on rural food sustainability issues. Participants travelled to Italy in September to visit the headquarters of FAO, IFAD, and WFP in Rome, and local GIAHS-accredited sites. OUIK also promoted GIAHS education by implementing an online exchange programme for students in Noto, Japan and Ifugao, the Philippines. The sessions in January and March deepened understanding of local culture and lifestyles in relation to GIAHS sites. In March, OUIK hosted a study tour for UNU-IAS students to the Noto GIAHS, which fostered cross-cultural learning on sustainable agriculture. The participants gained valuable knowledge on challenges faced by rural areas in Japan such as an ageing population and declining labour force.

## PUBLICATION

### **Nature as Culture**



This UNU-IAS Working Paper (No. 1, 2023) explores the critical role of culture in shaping human interactions with nature in the context of biodiversity loss. It considers initiatives that could capture bio-cultural linkages, identifying indicators for scenario modelling (full title: Nature as Culture: Conceptualizing What It Implies and Potential Ways to Capture the Paradigm in Scenario Building Exercises).

This online symposium discussed best practices for ecosystem restoration, green infrastructure, and youth engagement to accelerate action to conserve and restore wetlands (2 February). It emphasized the co-benefits of wetland restoration beyond biodiversity and ecosystems — including climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and human well-being. The event was organized in partnership with Wetlands International Japan (WIJ), the Global Environment Outreach Centre (GEOC), and MOEJ.

## EVENT

### **World Wetlands Day 2023**

This online symposium discussed best practices for ecosystem restoration, green infrastructure, and youth engagement to accelerate action to conserve and restore wetlands (2 February). It emphasized the co-benefits of wetland restoration beyond biodiversity and ecosystems — including climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and human well-being. The event was organized in partnership with Wetlands International Japan (WIJ), the Global Environment Outreach Centre (GEOC), and MOEJ.





# Water & Resource Management

## POLICY ENGAGEMENT

### UN 2023 Water Conference

The first UN conference on water in four decades addressed the urgent need to ensure universal access to clean water and sanitation (22–24 March, New York). It generated more than 700 commitments to the new Water Action Agenda — an ambitious action plan for a water-secure future. UNU-IAS organized two side events advancing science-based solutions and collaboration, and announced a new partnership for urban water sustainability in Asia.

An event on 23 March examined the status of water security, focusing on indicators and data to identify gaps and challenges related to SDG 6 (clean water & sanitation). UNU-IAS presented its water valuation framework, which provides a comprehensive picture of the role of water in sustainable development in Asia. The event was organized with the UNU Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH), Northwestern University, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Health Organization (WHO), WaterAid, and the UNU Institute for Integrated Management of Material Fluxes and of Resources (UNU-FLORES).

An online side event on 18 March discussed the multi-stakeholder partnerships, technology transfer and localization, and capacity building that are needed

to ensure sustainable use and management of water. UNU-IAS announced the Partnership for Urban Water Sustainability in Asia, a 2-year initiative to develop collaboration between academic institutions and the governments of Member States in Asia on measuring water quality in cities. The event was co-organized with the UNU Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS); UNU-FLORES; the Ministry of the Environment, Japan (MOEJ); the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, Japan (IGES); the Institute for Future Initiatives, University of Tokyo; and Future Earth.

## PROJECT

### Water for Circular Societies (WCS)

This project collects scientific evidence to develop water environment policies in Asia, providing comprehensive solutions to water and related development objectives. It develops Water Sustainability Indicators to capture socio-economic, environmental, and governance factors affecting water environments in Asia. By applying these indicators in selected locations it aims to propose optimal wastewater management systems, with a focus on domestic water use. During 2023 analysis of over 400 scientific papers established the distinctive features of water sustainability indices. The project validated its index in Tokyo to confirm its suitability.

## EVENT

### World Water Week

UNU-IAS organized an online session of this annual conference, on the theme Sustainable Urban Water for Human Health and Well-being (20 August). It highlighted the crucial role of multi-sector water management in bolstering societal resilience, economic prosperity, and environmental sustainability. The session deepened understanding and collaboration towards enhancing water-related health and well-being outcomes in urban settings.





PROJECT

**Nexus Approaches for Water Security & Climate Adaptation**

A new project was launched by UNU-IAS and UNU-FLORES to strengthen cooperation between Germany, Japan, and the Republic of Korea in the field of water security and climate change adaptation. The NASCENT project (full title: Nexus Approaches to Address Water Security and Climate Change Adaptation) supports mobility of scientists and doctoral students to enhance trilateral cooperation in research, postgraduate education and knowledge transfer. As part of the project a researcher and a doctoral student of UNU-FLORES visited UNU-IAS in August–September/October–November 2023 to conduct research on the impact of artificial structures on water turbulence and fish migration in rivers, and data acquisition and analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data from Japanese companies.

PROJECT

**Framework for Organizational Decision-Making Process in Water Reuse for Smart Cities**

This joint project with UNU-FLORES formulated an assessment mechanism for companies' value chains to promote reuse of wastewater. It was completed with a workshop at UNU-IAS in Tokyo (8–10 November), which shared multi-disciplinary insights on water reuse and addressed climate-responsive strategies. The SMART-WaterDomain project (full title: Framework for Organizational Decision-Making Process in Water Reuse for Smart Cities), was supported by a joint funding scheme of EU countries and the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST).

PUBLICATION

**Assessment Tools for Transboundary Water Basins**

Published in the *Journal of Environmental Management* (vol. 72), this article evaluates and compares tools to assess interlinkages between water, energy, food, and health in transboundary water basins. These areas cover 45 per cent of the Earth's land surface and play a vital role in economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Based on a systematic review, the article finds limitations in 72 per cent of analyzed tools. It identifies Bayesian networks, system dynamics, agent-based models, life-cycle assessments, and input-output tools as accessible options for efficient scenario-based assessments (full title: A Systematic Review of Methodological Tools for Evaluating the Water, Energy, Food, and One Health Nexus in Transboundary Water Basins).

PUBLICATION

**Factors Affecting Farmers' Perception of Greywater Irrigation in Urban Agriculture in the Colombo District, Sri Lanka**

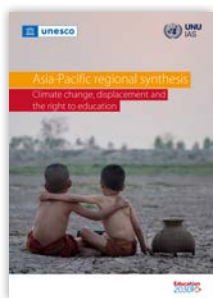
This article in the *Journal of Water and Environment Technology* (vol. 21), examines perceptions towards greywater irrigation among urban farmers in the Colombo District in Sri Lanka. It reveals that the farmers are willing to reuse greywater for farming activities, and that farm management factors such as irrigation source, farm size, and farmers' preferences for different crop types have a significant influence on their perceptions of greywater irrigation.



# Innovation & Education

## PROJECT

### Climate Change Displacement and the Right to Education



This project examined the impacts of climate change and displacement on the right to education in Asia and the Pacific – the global region most impacted by natural disasters and climate change. In collaboration with UNESCO, it analyzed policies and challenges in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Tuvalu, and Viet Nam.

The findings were published in the book *Asia-Pacific Regional Synthesis: Climate Change, Displacement and the Right to Education* (UNESCO and UNU-IAS, April 2023). It offers evidence-based recommendations for building national education systems that are resilient to the impacts of climate change and ensure the minimum learning disruption for all ages during displacements. The book was launched at the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) 79th Session, with a side event discussing how partnerships could contribute to strengthening education systems (Bangkok, 17 March). Recommendations were further promoted through two UNU-IAS Policy Briefs, focusing on governance and policy gaps (No. 40, 2023) and resilient education in small island developing states (No. 43, 2023). UNU-IAS presented the findings at COP28 in Dubai (see pg. 10), through an event co-organized with the Government of Thailand, UNESCO and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It emphasized the role of data in predicting human mobility patterns, the need for international cooperation to protect the human rights of people on the move, and community-based approaches to provide contextualized solutions.

## PARTNERSHIP

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

This network comprises 190 RCEs across the 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 ESD agenda.

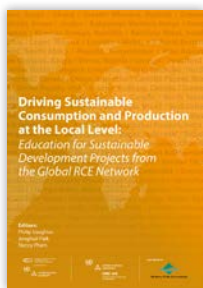
Continuing to focus on youth empowerment, the network organized an online side event of the 2023 ECOSOC Youth Forum (26 April) in which RCE Regional Youth Coordinators from Africa, the Americas, and Europe showcased youth-led projects for climate action, sustainability-focused student journals, and joint RCE initiatives. These four youth coordinators also participated for the first time in a meeting of the network's Ubuntu Committee of Peers (Kuala Lumpur, 30 October), sharing achievements and planned initiatives. Other activities included the RCE Youth Art Challenge Exhibition (see pg. 13), the 5th Japanese RCE Youth Meeting (22 February; Aichi, Japan) and the 3rd RCE Youth Webinar (10 August, online).

The annual RCE Awards recognized 35 outstanding RCE projects on themes such as disaster risk reduction, plants and animals, forests and trees, ecotourism, waste, agriculture, the arts and curriculum development. The 13th Global RCE Conference was held in Kuala Lumpur, with representatives from 43 RCEs in 39 different countries (31 October – 2 November). UNU-IAS supported regional RCE Meetings for Africa (August, online), the Americas (September; Atlanta, USA), Asia and the Pacific (September; Tongyeong, Republic of Korea), and Europe (September, online).



## PUBLICATION

### **Sustainable Consumption and Production at the Local Level**



Published in June, this report showcases 12 innovative education projects by RCEs worldwide, focusing on responsible consumption & production (SDG 12). The projects illustrate the positive impacts of multi-stakeholder community-based education on resource efficiency,

waste management and consumer behaviour (full title: Driving Sustainable Consumption and Production at the Local Level: Education for Sustainable Development Projects from the Global RCE Network).

## PARTNERSHIP

### **Promotion of Sustainability in Postgraduate Education & Research Network (ProSPER.Net)**

As the secretariat of this network UNU-IAS leads collaboration by 55 higher education institutions in Asia and the Pacific on joint research projects and integrating sustainable development into postgraduate curriculums. The project Circular Economy Integration for Sustainable Built Environment Education was completed in April, producing a guidebook that was launched in a final webinar (29 June). The project was a collaboration between RMIT University (Australia), TERI School of Advanced Studies (India), Arabeav Kyrgyz State University (Kyrgyzstan), the University of Peradeniya (Sri Lanka) and the Asian Institute of Technology (Thailand). UNU-IAS and Sophia University (Tokyo) organized a ProSPER.Net Sustainability Forum on the topic Exploring the New Direction of Equity and Inclusion towards Transforming Education (Tokyo, 21 October). With speakers from UNESCO Bangkok, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan, and five ProSPER.Net member universities, it discussed the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on the provision of inclusive and equitable education.

## RESEARCH

### **Innovative Pedagogies & Action-Oriented Education**

Launched in April, this research project is creating a repository of evidence-based pedagogies for effective ESD (full title: Global RCE Network: Fostering Innovative Pedagogies and Action-Oriented Education for Sustainable Development). It aims to translate the SDGs into local action by communities and citizens beyond formal schooling. The project is a collaboration with Tokyo Institute of Technology and Sophia University, with funding from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS).

## POLICY ENGAGEMENT

### **Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI)**

The 2023 HESI Global Forum discussed challenges and opportunities for higher education, including digitalization and artificial intelligence, as part of the 2023 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (17 July, New York). A keynote address by UNU Rector Prof. Tshilidzi Marwala discussed the impact of digitalization and artificial intelligence on higher education. UNU-IAS organized a student viewing event in Tokyo, enabling the institute's postgraduate students to participate and raise issues including the importance of skills development in research and technology.

## PUBLICATION

### **ESD in the Context of Transformative Education**

This chapter in the *Handbook of Education Policy* (Edward Elgar, March 2023) analyzes ESD policy in formal school systems around the world, with a focus on primary and secondary education. It examines challenges and gaps between high-level policy formation and local implementation, providing recommendations for future research and policy initiatives.

## POLICY ENGAGEMENT

### **ESD-Net Global Meeting**

This UNESCO event convened a global community of practice for ESD that supports collaboration between Member States and other stakeholders (18–20 December). Held at UNU headquarters in Tokyo, it featured a UNU-IAS session focused on whole-of-society approaches to catalyze ESD. The session explored how intersectoral collaboration could help to move ESD beyond the classroom to reach every individual. As part of a webinar series leading up to the meeting, UNU-IAS organized a workshop on community-based action for sustainable consumption and production (21 September), which engaged 50 participants in knowledge exchange to design sustainable practices in their communities.



# 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. In 2023 UNU-IAS organized the second session under a new online model developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, in collaboration with New York University and the University of Johannesburg (12 January – 9 February). The intensive course engaged 20 postgraduate students from 12 countries in a programme that included resource sharing, workshops, and lectures delivered by African scholars and practitioners from the public and private sectors. It discussed skills and strategies needed to strengthen the capacity and resilience of communities, promote and enhance human rights, and contribute to sustainable development. Participants were encouraged to question their assumptions about working on the African continent and develop a deeper understanding of sustainability issues.

## **39th 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. With the support of MEXT and the Japan Foundation for the United Nations University (jfUNU), the 39th seminar addressed the topic Sustainable Agriculture and Food Production: The Way Forward to Ensure Food Security (7–9 August). Held online, it engaged 30 participants including nine from developing countries. Through group work participants discussed sustainable agricultural practices and explored how these practices could help to ensure food security while mitigating negative impacts.

## **Grant for Global Sustainability**

This initiative, supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan (MEXT), builds collaboration with research and educational institutions in Japan to contribute to the 2030 Agenda. In the current phase GGS projects are focused on collaborative, policy-oriented research with diverse stakeholders including Japanese universities and the private sector, as well as UNU-IAS. In 2023 two projects were implemented. A project in Lao People's Democratic Republic, implemented in collaboration with Tokyo Institute of Technology, focused on enhancing skills of schoolteachers for integrating intangible cultural heritage into lesson plans using information and communications technology. A project with Sophia University is analyzing challenges and solutions for inclusive carbon-neutral societies, nature-based solutions and curriculum development on climate action for the Paris Agreement.

## **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 institutional links with key universities and think tanks in Japan and around the world. During 2023, fellows conducted research on a wide range of topics including water management in Asian cities, energy regulations and just transition in Sub-Saharan Africa, and governance of climate–SDG synergies.



### International Seminar Series on Sustainability

This seminar engaged 29 high school students from across Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan in lectures, presentations and interactive sessions (7–8 February, online). In addition to nurturing international perspectives among the students, the seminar provided valuable experience for early-career researchers at UNU-IAS in delivering research findings to broader audiences, including youth. The seminar was organized in collaboration with Ibaraki Prefectural Board of Education.

### Thailand Net Zero

This two-year project (full title: K-eco Global Net-Zero Partnership) enhanced expertise and capacities of government officials and young leaders to advance achievement of a carbon-neutral society in Thailand. During 2023 UNU-IAS conducted a workshop for government officials and a youth ideathon, both in Bangkok (see pg. 10). The project was funded by the Government of the Republic of Korea and implemented by Korea Environment Corporation (K-eco).



# 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 opportunities and cultural experiences.

Academic cooperation and student exchange agreements enable the transfer of credits with the University of Tokyo (UTokyo), International Christian University (ICU) and Sophia University. Through these schemes UNU-IAS students have access to more than 220 relevant courses at partner universities. UNU-IAS has also been implementing joint diploma programmes with Sophia University and UTokyo. A range of scholarships are provided to support outstanding students, from the Japan Foundation for the UNU (jfUNU), the UNU Rector's Office, UNU-IAS, Asian Development Bank and Resona Bank.

**30** students from **20** countries

**60%** female, **40%** male

**77%** from developing countries

**67%** 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.



**Lorena Gómez Ramírez**  
MSc Student, Colombia

*"I grew up and did my BSc in Anthropology in Bogota D.C. During my studies, I was moved by the discrimination and environmental conflicts farmers and ethnic groups face despite their contribution to society. Wanting to step out of the urban bubble and listen to them, I started doing field-work since I was 23."*

*I was first attracted by the idea of studying in a place that is not only a university, but also a think-tank connected to the United Nations. I wanted to pursue my master's in a place that welcomes innovation and where academic ideas are heard by influential thought leaders and/or decision-makers. Also, the idea of living and studying in Japan for 2 years sounded challenging and exciting at the same time.*

*I value having the opportunity to learn from professors who have worked for other agencies or who directly participate in negotiation spaces. Their insights help me realistically understand the United Nations as an organization from the inside: what it can and cannot do, and how complex global, intercultural, and interdisciplinary dialogue is."*



**Mark M. Akrofi**  
PhD Graduate, Ghana

*"I have a background in energy policy and planning, and my research focuses on the governance, policies, and processes of sustainable energy transitions. I am passionate about sustainability, and I hope that through research and advocacy I can make meaningful contributions to building a sustainable world.*

*The UNU-IAS PhD in Sustainability Science enriched my perspective profoundly, combining theoretical knowledge and practical applications to hone my problem-solving skills. The programme's blend of rigorous coursework, hands-on research experience, and interactions with leading experts and students from diverse background allowed me to gain a comprehensive understanding of sustainability issues.*

*As I embark on the next phase of my journey as postdoctoral research fellow, the PhD in Sustainability Science at UNU-IAS has equipped me with a solid foundation. The program's emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration, critical thinking, and research skills has prepared me for a dynamic career in sustainability research and advocacy."*



**Kitzia Irina Oribe Aguilar**  
MSc Student, Mexico

*"I'm an environmental systems engineer, my background is on energy and climate change, and I have experience in the private sector. After I finished my studies, I realized I did not want to continue at a technical level because there was a huge gap between the technical level of knowledge and the implementation, that's why I decided to jump into public policies.*

*I think the learning environment at UNU-IAS is very different from some universities that I've been to. The programme here is like an open ground where you are provided with all the tools you need, it's a safe space where you can be curious. We have access to a lot of research portals and other instruments. The supervisors and professors giving the courses are very knowledgeable, they have a lot of experience and are not restricted to their own field. The courses are very interdisciplinary.*

*Usually, when studying more technical subjects, these topics are approached separately and at some point, you understand that they connect to each other. But here, from the beginning, subjects are interconnected, and you study them with a holistic approach. That's been completely game changing for me."*

# Knowledge Transfer & Communications

- Publications ▶ pg. 28
- In the News ▶ pg. 29
- On Screen ▶ pg. 31



# Publications

UNU-IAS researchers produced 56 publications during 2023, including 44 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. Six were published during 2023:

- Leaving No One Behind in Carbon Neutrality Strategies: Insights from Developing Countries in Asia and the Pacific (No. 39)
- Bridging the Governance Gap: Protecting the Education Rights of Climate Displaced Persons in South and Southeast Asia (No. 40)
- Accelerating Climate Action in Africa: Insights from the 2022 Voluntary National Reviews (No. 41)
- Closing the Gap on City Climate Finance in Developing Countries (No. 42)
- Climate Change Displacement and the Right to Education in Small Island Developing States (No. 43)
- Landscape Approaches to Ecosystem Restoration: Lessons Learned from Managing Socio-Ecological Production Landscapes & Seascapes (No. 44)

## **Books**

Recent books produced by UNU-IAS researchers include:

- *Asia-Pacific Regional Synthesis: Climate Change, Displacement and the Right to Education* (UNESCO and UNU-IAS, 2023)
- *Driving Sustainable Consumption and Production at the Local Level: Education for Sustainable Development Projects from the Global RCE Network* (UNU-IAS, 2023)
- *Ecosystem Restoration through Managing Socio-Ecological Production Landscapes and Seascapes* (Springer Singapore, 2023)

## **Sustainability Science Journal**

The scientific journal *Sustainability Science* is a collaborative initiative of UNU-IAS and the UTokyo Institute for Future Initiatives (IFI), published by Springer. It has developed a profile as one of the leading journals in the field, with an impact factor of 6.0 (2022 data) and a global ranking of 13th in the Sustainable Development category (Google Scholar). A total of 187 articles were published in 2023, with special features on social-ecological systems, sustainable food and land use, bioeconomic change, and just and sustainable transitions for a net-zero Asia.

# 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.

## Landmark U.N. Deals Highlight Need to See Ties Between Climate and Biodiversity

*The Japan Times, 2 April*

An op-ed by Himangana Gupta (Research Fellow and Academic Associate) discussed the outcomes of the 2022 UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP15) and the 2022 UN Climate Change Conference (COP27). It highlighted the links between biodiversity loss and climate change, arguing for policies that can address both challenges in a mutually reinforcing way.

## The Masters of a 5,000-year-old Craft

*BBC Travel, 20 May*

Focusing on the Miyama region in Japan, this article featured comments by UNU-IAS expert Maiko Nishi (Research Fellow) on the concept of *satoyama* — places where human settlements (*sato*) meet the mountains (*yama*) to form ecosystems where people and nature live in harmony.

## Japan and the Path to Net-zero

*Diplomatic Courier, 21 May*

Published during the 2023 G7 summit that took place in Japan, this article by Joni Jupesta (Research Fellow and Academic Associate) focused on the crucial role of negative emission technologies in Japan's pathways towards carbon neutrality.

## Protect Education Rights amid Climate Displacement

*The Japan News, 23 August*

An op-ed by Jonghwi Park (Academic Programme Officer) and Ying-Syuan (Elaine) Huang (Postdoctoral Researcher, Faculty of Education, McGill University) drew attention to the urgent need to address education challenges faced by climate-displaced people.



## Eighth Japan Youth Environmental Activity Contest

*Yomiuri SDGs Newspaper, March edition*

Published in Japanese, the March special edition of the Yomiuri SDGs Newspaper featured the 8th Japan Youth Environmental Activity Contest, which was co-organized by UNU-IAS to empower youth from across the country. This edition included comments by Shinobu Yume Yamaguchi (Director).



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### **Progress Towards Achieving the SDGs in Japan**

*Television Station Tokyo MX, Horijun's Morning FLAG, 2 October*

An interview with Akio Takemoto (Head of Programme and Administration) was broadcast by the local television station Tokyo MX, in Japanese. Dr. Takemoto stressed the need for international collaboration and for each country to make proactive efforts to advance the goals, including Japan.

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### **Addressing E-Waste in Nairobi and Surrounding Regions**

*Africa Business, 29 October*

This opinion piece introduced a project in the Greater Nairobi area that is addressing e-waste and promoting awareness of the issue. It was authored by experts engaged with RCE Greater Nairobi – part of the UNU-IAS initiative Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (RCEs; see pg. 21).

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### **UNU Holds Bicycle Eco-tour**

*Hokuriku Chunichi Shimbun, 23 May*

This article in a regional Japanese newspaper featured a UNU-IAS event held in Kanazawa City on 21 May to celebrate International Day for Biological Diversity. Focusing on urban nature and its role in biodiversity conservation, the event engaged participants in a bicycle tour of the city, a tea ceremony and maintenance of traditional gardens.

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### **COP28 Bookazine**

*Diplomatic Courier, COP28 special publication, November*

This special publication featured five op-eds by UNU-IAS experts exploring issues that were high on agenda of the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference (COP28; see pg. 11).

- “Empowering Youth to Become Sustainability Leaders” by Sawaros Thanapornsangst (JSPS-UNU Postdoctoral Fellow)
- “Universal Climate Literacy is the Path to Net-Zero” by Jonghwi Park (Academic Programme Officer)
- “Climate Change Communication for the Planet and the People” by Ahmad Mohammad Khalid (JSPS-UNU Postdoctoral Fellow)
- “Advancing Youth Climate Action from Global to Local Levels” by Himangana Gupta (Research Fellow and Academic Associate)
- “How Simple Changes in Daily Life Can Help the World Achieve Net Zero” by Joni Jupesta (Academic Programme Officer)



# On Screen

UNU-IAS videos showcase innovative solutions to sustainability challenges, presenting stories of research in action and interviews with local practitioners. They include original documentaries, research outputs, in-depth interviews and promotional shorts. This page presents a selection of the 10 videos produced by UNU-IAS during 2023.

View & subscribe ▼  
[youtube.com/@unu-ias](https://youtube.com/@unu-ias)

## Kanazawa Gardens Series

This four-part series highlights the role of urban nature in preserving biodiversity and promoting sustainable urban development. Featuring traditional gardens of

Kanazawa City in Japan, the videos illustrate how urban nature contributes to human well-being and biocultural diversity.



Kanazawa, a City Blessed by Water



Gardens and the Lives of Artisans



Gardens Bringing People Together



Culture & Nature: The Future of Kanazawa





### **Biodiversity, Health, and Sustainability – Examining the Links**

This video introduces the UNU-IAS book *Biodiversity-Health-Sustainability Nexus in Socio-Ecological Production Landscapes and Seascapes* (SEPLS). The authors explain how local and traditional knowledge can help to sustainably manage natural resources, conserve and restore biodiversity and ensure good health for all, sharing insights from research in Kenya and Mexico.



### **The Development of the SDGs and Expectations for the Future – Interview with Shun-ichi Murata**

Professor Shun-ichi Murata, who contributed to the SDGs as a UN task force member, explores the process and thoughts behind their formulation, and the essence of the SDGs.



### **Study in Sustainability at UNU-IAS**

This video introduces the UNU-IAS postdoctoral degree programmes, featuring perspectives from master's and doctoral students as well as faculty. It highlights the unique benefits of a global university within the UN system and the opportunity to conduct collaborative research.

# 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 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 localising 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 Sustainable Development

Advancing sustainable development depends on translating the global vision of the SDGs and related agendas into practice and ensuring their effective implementation. UNU-IAS mobilizes knowledge, expertise and partnerships to strengthen governance and policymaking processes for sustainable development and localize 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 of 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 2023 GEOC engaged public audiences on issues such as climate change, decarbonization, localization of the SDGs, and youth empowerment by integrating expertise across thematic areas and demonstrating synergistic approaches. GEOC also serves as a venue for people to visit and gather at the UNU headquarters building in Tokyo, helping to bring UNU closer to the public. During 2023 the center received more than 16,500 visitors.

## **Staffing**

As of December 2023, UNU-IAS had a staff of 80, comprising nationals of 26 different countries. Women constituted 61% 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 2023 meeting of the Board was held on 8–9 November.

### **UNU-IAS Board Members**

*As of December 2023*

- **Dr. Melissa Brown Goodall** (USA)  
Senior Director, Environmental Innovations Initiative, University of Pennsylvania
- **Mr. Mitsuo Kojima** (Japan)  
President & Representative Director, Affirmative Investment Management Japan Inc.
- **Dr. Philip Osano** (Kenya) CHAIR  
Centre Director, Stockholm Environment Institute Africa
- **Prof. Yukari Takamura** (Japan)  
Professor, Institute for Future Initiatives, University of Tokyo

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 2023 over USD 20,000*

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

**End of Report**

**United Nations University**

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UNU is committed to the ideals and practices of environmental sustainability,  
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**THE GLOBAL GOALS**  
For Sustainable Development