



ACUNS ANNUAL MEETING 2025

Theme: Environmental Multilateralism and Human Development

Activities Report & Session Outcomes

23-25 June 2025, Nairobi, Kenya

Main Annual Meeting Venues:

University of Nairobi

Address: University Way/Hurry Thuku Road,
P.O. Box 30197-00100, Nairobi, Kenya

United Nations Office at Nairobi

Address: Limuru Road, United Nations Avenue, Gigiri
P.O. Box 67578-00200, Nairobi, Kenya



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

All times are in East Africa Time (UTC+3)

MONDAY, 23 JUNE 2025

Location: University of Nairobi

2:30 - 3:30 pm	Registration & Badge Collection
3:30 – 5:30 pm	Opening Plenary and Keynote Address Dr. Franz Baumann , ACUNS President & Researcher Georgetown University Professor Margaret Jesang Hutchinson , Vice Chancellor, University of Nairobi. Title of Address: <i>Tackling African Environmental Crises through Research, Innovation and Multilateralism</i> Professor Gilbert Ouma , Institute of Climate Change and Adaptation (ICCA) Professor Siphila W. Mumenya Dean, Faculty of Engineering Professor Albert Mumma , Centre for Advanced Studies on Environmental Law and Policy (CASELAP) Ms. Seraphine Kando , Human Rights Specialist, African Union Commission. Ms. Rose Mwebaza , United Nations Regional Office for Africa Dr. David Obura , Founder and Director, Cordio East Africa and Chair, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Mr. Edwin Abonyo , Chairman National Museums of Kenya Representative Ministry of Education (invited) Ambassador Njambi Kinyungu , Deputy Director General, Multilateral Affairs Representative Ministry of the Environment (invited) Professor Maria Ivanova , Co-Chair 2025 ACUNS Annual Meeting Co-Moderator: Professor Alice Odingo , Co-Chair 2025 ACUNS Annual Meeting Co-Moderator: Ambassador Ababu Namwamba , Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations Office in Nairobi (UNON)
5:30 – 7:00 pm	Networking Session

TUESDAY, 24 JUNE 2025

Location: University of Nairobi

8:30 – 9:00 am	Registration & Badge Collection
9:00 – 10:15 am	TUE-A: Simultaneous Panels and Roundtables
10:15 – 10:30 am	Coffee/Tea Break
10:30 – 11:45 am	TUE-B: Simultaneous Panels and Roundtables
12:00 – 1:00 pm	The Case for an Arid Cities Network? Earthna Center for a Sustainable Future Dr. Michal Mlynar , Deputy Executive-Director, UN-Habitat Ms. Maja Groff , Convenor, Climate Governance Commission



UN Mission in South Sudan Official (invited)

Mr. Sebastien Turbot, Earthna Center for a Sustainable Future

Moderator: **Ms. Maria Kisumbi**, Humanity United

Grace Gao, Executive Director, Global SDGs and Leadership Development

Center | Launch of the Young Scientist SDGs Award

Amb. Sani Bala, Executive Director, Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy, and Development | Overview of the ANUMDI (African Research Network on Regional & Global Governance Innovation) 2nd Annual Meeting in Nairobi

1:00 - 2:00 pm

Lunch

2:15 – 3:30 pm

TUE-C: Simultaneous Panels and Roundtables

3:30 – 3:45 pm

Coffee/Tea Break

4:00 – 5:00 pm

ACUNS Lecture in Honour of Kofi Annan | Intergenerational Dialogue

Mr. Donald Kaniaru, Managing Partner, Kaniaru & Kaniaru Advocates

|International Council of Environmental Law (ICEL) Representative to

UNEP

Mr. Alphonse Munyao Muia, Headquarter and Host Country Focal Point, UNEP Children and Youth Major Group (CYMG)

Moderator: **Professor Maria Ivanova**, Co-Chair, ACUNS Annual Meeting

5:15 – 6:00 pm

Theatre Performance

Who knows it feels it: a waste pickers' perspective for a just transition

Professor Cressida Bowyer, University of Portsmouth

Professor Erika Hughes, University of the Arts London

Members of the **Kenyan National Waste Pickers Welfare Association** and the **Social Justice Travelling Theatre**

6:00 - 7:00 pm

Networking Session

WEDNESDAY, 25 JUNE

Location: United Nations Offices, Gigiri

7:30 – 8:30 am

Security & Check-in

8:30 – 9:45 am

WED-A: Simultaneous Panels and Roundtables

9:45 – 10:00 am

Coffee/Tea Break

10:00 - 11:15 am

WED-B: Simultaneous Panels and Roundtables

11:30 – 12:30 pm

Holmes Lecture

Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, Director-General, UNON

Dr. David Passarelli, Director, United Nations University - Centre for Policy Research



Title of Address: *Ingenuity and Impact: Reflecting on 80 Years of Multilateral Cooperation Amid Global Reordering*

Moderator: **Professor Lise Howard**, Georgetown University

12:30 – 1:30 pm

Global Policy Dialogue: Readouts & Feedback

Mr. Ababu Namwamba, Permanent Representative of Kenya to UNEP & UNON

Mr. Peter Maddens, Ambassador of Belgium to Kenya, Madagascar, Seychelles, Comoros, Eritrea, Somalia; Permanent Representative to UNEP and Habitat

Mr. Taleng Faha Aristide, Deputy Head of Mission, Consulate of the Republic of Cameroon

Mr. Henk Jan Bakker, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Kenya, Somalia, Eritrea and Seychelles; Permanent Representative to UNEP and Habitat

Mr. Mirko Giulietti, Ambassador of Switzerland to Kenya, Eritrea, Rwanda, Somalia and Uganda Permanent Representative to UNEP and Habitat

Ms. Seraphine Kando, Human Rights Specialist, African Union Commission

Co-Moderator: **Ms. Nudhara Yusuf**, Stimson Center, Global Governance Innovation Network

Co-Moderator: **Dr. Richard Ponzio**, Stimson Center and Co-Director, Global Governance Innovation Network

1:30 - 2:30 pm

Lunch

2:30 - 4:00 pm

Pioneering Environmental Governance: The Role of the UN and the Path Forward

Mr. Themba Kalua, Director, Pact of the Future Implementation, Executive Office of the UN Secretary General (EOSG)

Mr. Stephen Jackson, UN Resident Coordinator in Kenya

Ms. Edlam Abera Yemeru, Director of External Relations Strategy, Knowledge, and Innovation Division, UN-Habitat

Ms. Patricia Mbote, Director, Law Division, United Nations Environment Programme

Professor Alice Odingo, Co-Chair 2025 ACUNS Annual Meeting

Professor Maria Ivanova, Co-Chair 2025 ACUNS Annual Meeting

Moderator: **Dr. Franz Baumann**, Researcher Georgetown University and President ACUNS

AWARDS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

ACUNS Dissertation Award Winner

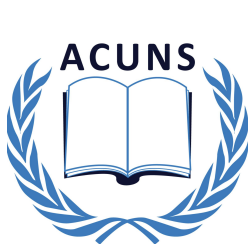
ACUNS Service Award

Announce Annual Meeting 2026

4:00 – 5:00 pm

Networking Session

ANNUAL MEETING HOSTS:



ANNUAL MEETING SPONSORS:





Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra





INTRODUCTION

ACADEMIC COUNCIL ON THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM (ACUNS)

Purpose:

The Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) unites people who are active in the work and study of the UN, to better understand and address the most pressing global issues of our time. The United Nations was founded in 1945 to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” In the 21st Century, it is not only war, but also climate change, pandemic disease, new weapons, displacement, inequality, bigotry and extremism that threaten global well-being. Because these challenges disregard borders, no sovereign nation will succeed in countering them alone. Solutions to improve the human condition will most likely advance with evidence-based analysis, international legal agreement, and multilateral action. As the only institution with worldwide membership, an effective United Nations is an existential imperative for the global good. ACUNS serves to foster well-studied action in the UN system.

Vision:

ACUNS was established in 1987 by a group of concerned scholars at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, USA. They envisioned a professional association that would unite students, scholars, advisers, practitioners, and policy makers focused on evidence-based analysis of the UN system. Since then, five universities have hosted ACUNS. In 2020, ACUNS became an independent nonprofit organization, providing a durable foundation for future development. The ACUNS secretariat is currently hosted at Georgetown University.

Mission:

Through events, publications, and online networking opportunities, ACUNS fosters analysis and debate about major international challenges. ACUNS increases the accessibility of the UN system to scholars, and facilitates the development of new scholarship about the UN and international affairs. It also recognizes and awards exceptional scholarship about the UN system. Through its work, ACUNS seeks to nurture the growth of scholarship, legal instruments, and informed policy solutions to global challenges.

INTRODUCTION to the 2025 ANNUAL MEETINGS:

The 2025 ACUNS Annual Meeting had the following types of Panels/Roundtables:

- **In-Person:** panels and roundtables where ALL of the speakers are joining us in Nairobi, Kenya.
- **Hybrid:** panels and roundtables where SOME (but not all) of the speakers will join us in-person.
- **Virtual:** panels and roundtables where ALL of the speakers are unable to attend in person. The [v] signifies virtual attendance. (Please see the Virtual programme on our website).
- **Youth Track** will be included in the virtual programming for the Meeting.

GSLDC PARTICIPATION HIGHLIGHTS

University of Nairobi & UN HQ Nairobi, 23rd - 25th June 2025

The Global SDGs and Leadership Development Center (GSLDC) participated in its second consecutive ACUNS annual meetings, after its first participation last year in Tokyo, Japan.

SHAPING GLOBAL DIALOGUE at the 2025 ACUNS ANNUAL MEETING in Nairobi

This year Annual Meeting explored how global cooperation can respond to the challenges of an increasingly interconnected and fragile world. In this regard, GSLDC played a vital role as a Silver Sponsor of the annual meetings in Nairobi, by engaging with multistakeholders including; policymakers, researchers, UN officials, civil society and government leaders with a focus on strengthening multilateralism for a sustainable future. GSLDC activities and engagements all through the three days of the event were centered on conveying high-level experts for panel discussions, networking sessions and unveiling the 2025 Young Scientist SDGs Award to a global network of researchers.

Representatives from international organizations such as; UNITAR, UNEP and UNU, as well as Think-Tanks, NGOs and universities such as; ANUMDI, Amnesty International, Oxfam, ADIE, Jomo Kenyatta University, University of Cambridge, Northeastern University and GeorgeTown University participated in panel discussions on climate justice, environmental multilateralism, and the role of digital technologies. Their insights bridged the gap between academic research and on-the-ground realities, emphasizing community-led approaches to sustainable development. One important highlight was the panel discussion that GSLDC co-hosted with a local NGO from Kenya; NURU Trust Network (NTN) on "**Intergenerational Dialogue for a Sustainable Future: Shaping Inclusive Societies via Environmental Multilateralism**" which sparked discussions on equitable partnerships in crisis response.

The second major highlight of GSLDC participation at the ACUNS Annual Meeting, was the official launch of the Young Scientist SDGs Award by **Ms. Grace GAO** (Executive Director of GSLDC) in presence of **Dr. Michal Mlynar** the Deputy Executive-Director of UN-Habitat and other high-level guests. This was an important milestone for GSLDC, as we developed great interest from the global academic and scientific community for advancing innovation in research and building international platforms to identify the next generation of sustainable development leaders. Most importantly, the Center announced the Young Scientist SDGs Award ceremony is scheduled to be held in Wenzhou, China from the 25th - 27th October 2025.

GSLDC delegation also engaged with UN officials, urging greater accountability in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, keynote addresses by **Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura**, UN Nairobi Office Director-General, and **Dr. David Passarelli**, Director, United Nations University (UNU) - Centre for Policy Research, underscored the need for intergenerational collaboration in policy-making.

Finally, the meeting reinforced the value of policymakers, civil society and academic partnerships in shaping multilateral strategies. As ACUNS looks ahead to next year annual meeting in Lisbon, the active participation of organizations such as GSLDC ensures that diverse voices remain central to global governance debates. Nairobi's vibrant setting further highlighted the importance of centering diverse perspectives in international discourse.

For GSLDC, the event was a vital platform to influence policy, share best practices, and strengthen networks—an opportunity to turn theory into tangible impact.

Day 1: MONDAY, 23 JUNE 2025 OPENING CEREMONY AND KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Venue: Mahatma Gandhi Building, Ground Floor, Taifa Hall
University of Nairobi, University Way/Hurry Thuku Road,
Nairobi, Kenya



Delegation of the Global SDGs and Leadership Development Center (GSLDC) at the opening ceremony.



Mr. Yifan Zhang (CEO of NatNav), Ms. Grace GAO (Executive Director of GSLDC), Ms. Jiadan YU (UNITAR) & Dr. Lionel MBANDA (GSLDC)



GSLDC among other official sponsors of ACUNS 2025 Annual Meetings in Nairobi.



Welcome address from Prof. Alice A. Oluoko-Odinga, Co-Chair of the 2025 Annual Meetings.

Day 2: TUESDAY, 24 JUNE 2025
PANEL DISCUSSION SESSION

Venue: Room 902, 9th Floor, University Towers
University of Nairobi, University Way/Hurry Thuku Road,

Session Topic: Intergenerational Dialogue for a Sustainable Future: Shaping Inclusive Societies via Environmental Multilateralism.

Session Objectives:

- Explore opportunities and challenges of intergenerational dialogue for environmental multilateralism.
- Examine the role of different age groups in environmental sustainability and social equity.
- Identify strategies to enhance intergenerational collaboration toward achieving the SDGs.

Moderator: Ms. Mary-Yvonne Ododah, Executive Director of Nuru Trust Network (NTN).

Speakers: - Ms. Jiadan YU, Head of Government and Public Affairs at the Division for Multilateral Diplomacy, UNITAR.

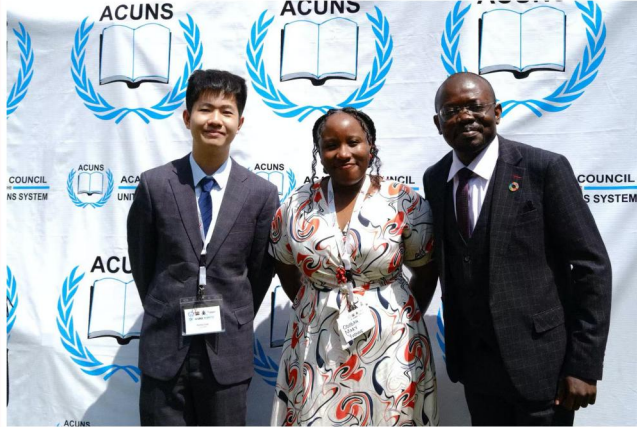
- Mr. Yifan ZHANG, Director, Youth Mobilization and Partnership, Global SDGs and Leadership Development Center.

- Ms. Jiangtao CHEN (Joanna), Founder of Xingfei Zhiyuan International Cultural Education Center.

Session Outcomes: At the ACUNS 2025 Annual Meeting, the intergenerational dialogue panel explored how inclusive multilateral environmental governance can be strengthened by bridging age, regional, and cultural divides. Each panellist brought a distinct, yet complementary perspective grounded in institutional practice, cultural insight, and youth-led innovation. **Ms. Jiadan Yu**, representing UNITAR, highlighted the organization's active role in fostering meaningful youth participation in global environmental diplomacy. She spoke about UNITAR's grant mechanisms, supported by the Swiss government, which embed principles of green economy and climate justice. **Ms Rita on behalf of Ms. Jiangtao Chen** emphasized the power of cultural diplomacy and vocational education in deepening intergenerational environmental engagement. She noted that by combining indigenous practices with modern techniques such as the Maasai community's dialogue-based approach, education systems can foster more holistic and sustainable environmental mindsets. **Mr. Yifan Zhang** focused on the role of youth networks and localized action as drivers of long-term environmental change. He encouraged young people to begin at the community level, referencing COP15 as a springboard for grassroots innovation.



PICTURES OF THE SESSION



Students from NPU China attending the panel discussion session



Mr. Yifan Zhang, GSLDC Director for Youth Mobilization and Ms. Mary Ododah Director of Nuru Trust Network (NTN).

In the afternoon, a high-level panel discussion moderated by Ms. **Nudhara Yusuf** Executive Coordinator of the Global Governance Innovation Network (GGIN) at the Stimson Center was held on the advancements and opportunities of developing an arid cities network. The session had in attendance experts such as; **Dr. Michal Mlynar** the Deputy Executive-Director of UN-Habitat who emphasized on the recent World Cities report launched by UN-Habitat. Mr. **Sebastien Turbot** gave examples of how the Earthna Center for a Sustainable Future is supporting the transformation of arid land in Qatar and the funding provided by the Qatar Foundation to implement policy research and advocacy. Finally, Ms. **Grace GAO** was invited to come stage by the moderated and she launched the Young Scientist SDGs Awards. The award recognize young scientists under 45 years who have made notable breakthroughs in fields related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It focuses on basic research and transformative technologies and building a global academic cooperation network.

LAUNCH OF THE YOUNG SCIENTIST SDGs AWARDS

THE CASE FOR AN ARID CITIES NETWORK? | Earthna Center for a Sustainable Future

Time: 12:00 – 1:00 pm

ROOM: Taifa Hall

Dr. Michal Mlynar, Deputy Executive-Director, UN-Habitat

Nassim Madjidi, Founder and Executive , Samuel Hall

Mr. Sebastien Turbot, Earthna Center for a Sustainable Future

Moderator: **Ms. Nudhara Yusuf**, Global Governance Innovation Network

Grace Gao, Executive Director, Global SDGs and Leadership Development Center | Launch of the Young Scientist SDGs Award



Ms. Grace GAO giving a speech to launch the Young Scientist SDGs Award.



Group picture of panelist attending the Young Scientist SDGs Award Launch Session.



Ms. Grace GAO, ED of GSLDC and Dr. Michal Mlynar, Deputy Executive-Director of UN-Habitat.



Opening speech from Dr. Michal Mlynar, Deputy Executive-Director of UN-Habitat.

Day 3: WEDNESDAY, 25 JUNE

Time: 10:00am - 11:45am

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION SESSION

Location: Room CR8, United Nations Offices, Gigiri, Nairobi

Session Topic: Applications, Opportunities and Challenges of utilizing innovative science-based technologies for addressing social equity in climate action strategies.

Session Objectives:

The main objective of the proposed round table discussion is to:

- **Raise Awareness:** Highlight how science-based technologies (AI, big data, remote sensing, etc.) can be harnessed to promote equitable climate solutions.
- **Bridge Knowledge Gaps:** Explore the intersection of technology, climate action, and social equity, ensuring marginalized voices are considered.
- **Address Challenges:** Discuss barriers (digital divide, funding gaps, policy constraints) that hinder equitable deployment of climate technologies.
- **Foster Multistakeholder Collaboration:** Encourage partnerships between governments, NGOs, youth, and private sectors to scale inclusive innovations.
- **Empower Youth & Local Communities:** Highlight how grassroots organizations and young leaders can drive tech-enabled climate justice.

Moderator: Dr. Lionel MBANDA (Chair), Global Youth Leadership Development Council (GYLDC)

Speakers: - Ms. Mary-Yvonne Ododah, Executive Director of Nuru Trust Network (NTN).

- Ms. Jiadan YU, Head of Government and Public Affairs at the Division for Multilateral Diplomacy, UNITAR Multilateral Division.

- Mr. Yifan ZHANG, Director, Youth Mobilization and Partnership, Global SDGs and Leadership Development Center.

Session Outcomes: The session started with **Ms. Jiadan** explaining how multilateral organizations like the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) play a crucial role in helping governments and communities integrate science-based technologies into climate policies while prioritizing marginalized groups. She gave examples of capacity building and training initiatives provided by UNITAR in the form of specialized training programs for policymakers, local leaders, and marginalized community representatives on climate science, data analysis, and technology applications. Moreover, she insisted that UNITAR bridges the gap between scientific research and policymaking by synthesizing complex climate data into actionable insights tailored for governments. **Ms. Mary Ododah**, emphasized on the ways local communities in

vulnerable regions can shift from being passive recipients to active co-creators of climate technologies by engaging in participatory approaches that center their knowledge, needs, and challenges. By facilitating dialogues where communities identify their most pressing climate challenges (e.g., water scarcity, crop failures) and prioritize technologies that address them (e.g., drought-resistant seeds, solar-powered irrigation). She gave examples of some local community projects in Kenya where community members are trained (especially women and youth) to install, repair, and manage technologies (e.g., biogas digesters, weather stations). **Mr. Yifan ZHANG**, gave examples of how youth-led initiatives can harness emerging technologies to amplify their climate advocacy, drive innovation, and hold stakeholders accountable while ensuring inclusivity and systemic impact. He encouraged youths to utilize the available social media tools in learning new skills and creating awareness about sustainable development. Furthermore, by deploying AI-powered analytics (e.g., Tweetreach, CrowdTangle) to optimize campaign messaging and track engagement. Alternatively, they could use open-source AI tools (e.g., Google's TensorFlow) to forecast local climate risks (floods, droughts) and demand policy action.



Some key moments of the roundtable panel discussion held at the UN headquarters in Nairobi.



GSLDC DELEGATION

GSLDC Delegation to the 2025 Annual Meetings in Nairobi:

- **Ms. Grace GAO**, Executive Director/Founder, GSLDC.
- **Ms. Jiadan YU**, Head of Government and Public Affairs at the Division for Multilateral Diplomacy, UNITAR Multilateral Division.
- **Dr. Lionel MBANDA**, International Programs Director, GSLDC.
- **Mr. Yifan ZHANG**, Director, Youth Mobilization and Partnership GSLDC and CEO of NatNavi.
- **Mr. Liao PEIHAO**, Youth Leader and Member of the Youth Committee of GSLDC.

Invited Guests:

- **Ms. Mary-Yvonne Ododah**, Executive Director of Nuru Trust Network (NTN)
- **Ms. Jiangtao CHEN (Joanna)**, Founder of Xingfei Zhiyuan International Cultural Education Center

Post-Event Important Links

Feedback Survey

We invite you to complete a short feedback survey to help us prepare for future Annual Meetings.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc_t_2gNcet5P6nV61y1fPT-LOhs9Mq3KmUgz8VQGdP6DmKUQ/viewform?mc_cid=c7112965d4&mc_eid=7ff6812e2c

Certificates of Participation

If you are in need of a Certificate of Participation, please complete a short request form.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdUOIUZ7Ko0T24fmjoE6-jExWzQnaRPNVCe3KTyOt_rES6G8A/viewform?mc_cid=c7112965d4&mc_eid=bdc64ad045