Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
24 March 2025

Original: English

2025 session
25 July 2024–30 July 2025
Agenda item 21
United Nations research and training institutes

Report of the Council of the United Nations University on the work of the University

Contents

Please recycle

I. Introduction: a year of global impact

1. The United Nations University (UNU) continues to provide useful interdisciplinary research and policy guidance in a world grappling with a polycrisis and the transformative power of emerging technologies. Operating at the intersection of sustainability, technology and governance, UNU helps policymakers and practitioners to navigate the complex ethical, economic and security implications of a changing world while supporting efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. In 2024, UNU contributed to global discussions on a range of critical topics, including sustainable development, climate adaption and resilience, public health and well-being, governance of artificial intelligence, gender equity and migration. Through its research and policy recommendations, it offered pragmatic solutions that emphasize inclusivity and sustainability – in particular in the global South, where the impacts of these challenges are often most pronounced. By focusing on the needs and perspectives of vulnerable populations, the University's work bridges the gap between the global North and the global South, striving to ensure that technological advancements support sustainable development.

3. Through its collaborative approach, UNU increased its impact as a global think tank and a catalyst for positive change. It supported policy reforms through knowledge-sharing and strategic partnerships with other United Nations system entities, international organizations, Governments and civil society. These partnerships both amplified the University's impact and facilitated the development of innovative solutions, contributing to more just, effective and global governance.

4. The present report showcases some of the University's initiatives in 2024, highlighting its ongoing contributions to global policy discussions. After presenting an overview of the global UNU system and the activities of its institutes, the report highlights examples of its solution-focused research in the context of the Goals, showcases its partnerships in support of the global South and describes its knowledge dissemination and outreach efforts.[1]

II. United Nations University organizational framework

A. Structure and activities

5. UNU operates as a global network of 13 institutes in 12 countries. Each institute focuses on a specific mandate as outlined in its statute and host country agreement. These institutes, including their thematic focuses and activities in 2024, are presented in section III.

6. The global UNU system, coordinated by the UNU Centre,[2] which is headquartered in Tokyo, spans several regions of the world, engages with diverse international and regional policy arenas and brings together experts from a wide range

---

[1] More information is provided in the publicly available UNU annual report for 2024 and on the UNU website.

[2] Comprising the UNU Centre in Tokyo, which oversees programming, planning and administration and houses the Office of the Rector, the administration and financial services, the Campus Computing Centre and the Office of Communications; the UNU Centre in Putrajaya, Malaysia, which provides administration, human resources and financial services support; the UNU Vice-Rectorate in Europe, located in Bonn, Germany, which strengthens and coordinates intrasystem collaboration and maintains partnerships with United Nations entities in Bonn and regional stakeholders; and the newly re-established UNU Paris office, which enhances cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

of academic disciplines. The University's research programme is organized around three overarching thematic clusters: peace and security; social change and economic development; and environment, climate and energy.

7. Through its network of institutes, UNU delivers evidence-based insights that inform key policy decisions and foster international cooperation on some of the most pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare. Key to the University's enduring relevance is its ability to evolve, adapting its research agenda to address frontier issues and emerging problems. In 2024, for example, UNU made significant contributions to shaping policy discussions on artificial intelligence regulation, in particular concerning its impact on equity, security and environmental sustainability. The University's research also informed United Nations initiatives on the ethical use of artificial intelligence in public health, education and environmental monitoring while pioneering artificial intelligence applications for climate resilience and sustainable resource management.

8. At the core of the University's mission is its ability to bridge science, policy and practice to generate solutions for complex interdisciplinary challenges. As both an autonomous research institution and a trusted knowledge partner within the United Nations system, UNU plays a pivotal role in shaping policy processes that promote sustainable development by translating cutting-edge research into practical recommendations.

B. Governance and leadership

9. The UNU Council, a 16-member body, oversees the operations of the global UNU system. The Council includes 12 appointed members[3] as well as the UNU Rector and three ex officio members: the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Executive Director of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). The Council is responsible for approving the UNU work programme and budget, adopting statutes and policies and providing strategic guidance. In 2024, the Council convened in Tokyo for its eighty-first session in June and its eighty-second session in December.

10. The UNU Rectorate leads and coordinates activities across the global UNU system. The Rector, Tshilidzi Marwala (South Africa), holds the rank of Under-Secretary-General and is the University's chief academic and administrative officer. The Rector is supported by the Office of the Rector in Tokyo and by two Vice-Rectors, one based in Tokyo and the other in Bonn, Germany. Since early 2024, the Executive Officer has been stationed in Paris to establish closer relations with UNESCO, draw on the rich think tank and academic landscape around UNESCO and in France and support the Rector's liaison with UNU institutes as well as institutional development efforts in the wider region.

11. The UNU administration develops unified standards and oversees financial reporting, human resources and procurement services across the UNU system.

12. Each UNU institute is led by a Director responsible for the institute's budget, research programmes and operation. Directors meet annually at the Conference of Directors and hold regular virtual meetings for coordination.

13. Each UNU institute benefits from the guidance of an advisory board or committee, which advises on thematic programming, management, quality assurance

---

[3] These Council members, who serve six-year terms, are appointed jointly by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Director General of UNESCO.

and fundraising. These bodies typically comprise three or more appointed members as well as the UNU Rector and the institute's Director.

14. Key UN bodies that provide governance oversight include the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the Board of Auditors and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

C. Human and financial resources

Personnel

15. UNU is dedicated to fostering a diverse, inclusive and accessible workplace that values racial, cultural, gender and sexual orientation diversity and ensures an environment free from discrimination, harassment or abuse. The University actively promotes gender equality and parity and encourages the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities. As a global institution, UNU is committed to ensuring robust representation of nationals from developing countries across its workforce.

16. UNU personnel comprise a blend of staff in the Professional and higher categories and the General Service and related categories (appointed under the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations) alongside visiting scholars, research associates, postdoctoral fellows, administrative and academic services personnel and specialized consultants. At the end of 2024, the global UNU system employed a total of 675 staff members, of whom 51 per cent were women and 45 per cent were nationals of developing countries. Among the global UNU personnel, 91 were classified in the Professional and higher categories and 60 in the General Service and related categories, while 225 were employed under personnel service agreements and 299 as consultants.

Finances

17. UNU operates independently of the United Nations regular budget, relying solely on voluntary contributions. These come primarily in the form of institutional funding (recurring host country contributions and investment income derived from the UNU Endowment Fund) and donations (from government bodies, foundations, agencies, international organizations and other donors) designated for specific research projects.

18. The approved budget for the 2024–2025 biennium is $116.7 million, allocated as follows: $51.9 million for staffing and personnel, $46.3 million for academic programme and specific project expenses and $18.5 million for general expenses.

19. To meet these expenditures, UNU expects to raise funds from project fundraising ($36.4 million), Endowment Fund income ($35.5 million), institutional fundraising ($27.5 million), cumulative surplus carried forward ($12.5 million), cost recovery ($2.3 million) and other income sources ($2.6 million).

III. Institutional highlights

20. In 2024, UNU researchers continued to advance practical, real-world solutions to some of the world's most pressing challenges, reaffirming the University's commitment to the Goals and the broader mission of fostering global resilience, equity and sustainability. Through cutting-edge research, innovative capacity-building initiatives and meaningful policy engagement, UNU institutes addressed a range of critical issues and acted as a catalyst for positive change across sectors and regions.

21. The following paragraphs provide an overview of the 13 UNU institutes and a review of the key activities and achievements of each institute in 2024.

22. The UNU Biotechnology Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNU-BIOLAC), located in Caracas, promotes the application of biotechnology for sustainable development. In 2024, UNU-BIOLAC co-sponsored 13 advanced biotechnology training courses at 10 universities and institutes in four countries and co-financed two webinars aimed at building biotechnology capacity for policymakers. The programme began to develop collaboration with India on topics such as vaccine production, public health and food production.

23. The UNU Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR), located in New York, generates innovative solutions to global public policy challenges and contributes to policy debates at the United Nations. UNU-CPR continued to bridge policy and practice in 2024, making key contributions to global policy discussions, in particular in support of the global South. Initiatives included partnering with the Peacebuilding Support Office to review peacebuilding projects across 45 countries, providing targeted recommendations to enhance programming and mitigate the impact of disinformation on peacebuilding efforts. UNU-CPR also played a central role in the High-level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence, offering research and policy advice to shape the governance of this frontier technology. It contributed significantly to advancing the recommendations of the High-level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, influencing global initiatives such as the Pact for the Future and the Global Digital Compact, and conducted impactful research on reform of the international financial architecture, advocating for more equitable funding mechanisms for developing nations. Strengthening its presence in Geneva, UNU-CPR partnered with the Office of the President of the General Assembly to produce a digital handbook to support Member States in peace and security discussions.

24. The UNU Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS), located in Bruges, Belgium, focuses on issues of governance, cooperation and intraregional and interregional integration. Its flagship project was the *Handbook of Regional Cooperation and Integration*, providing a comprehensive analysis of how regional cooperation addresses global challenges across a range of policy areas. Other notable research outputs included an in-depth report on environmental impact assessments of trade agreements, a study on gaps in Belgian flood risk governance, a policy brief on the localization of the Goals and a working paper on urban climate governance in the global South. UNU-CRIS contributed to a significant international event focused on managing global shocks and a policy dialogue on European Union-Latin American cooperation ahead of the twenty-ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Educational initiatives included the Doctoral School on Asian and Comparative Regionalism and the School of Modern Diplomacy.

25. The UNU Operating Unit on Policy-driven Electronic Governance (UNU-EGOV), located in Guimarães, Portugal, works at the intersection of governance, technology and development. Its flagship initiative was the South and East Africa Digital Governance Forum, a collaborative effort that brought together representatives from 18 countries to foster regional cooperation on digital governance strategies aligned with the Goals and the Global Digital Compact. Other significant projects included an assessment of e-government development at the local level and the launch of a health online service provision index aimed at evaluating and improving hospital portals to increase patient responsiveness. Key publications included reports from those two projects. In 2024, UNU-EGOV co-organized its annual International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance in South Africa, attracting 330 participants from 49 countries to discuss topics ranging

from artificial intelligence for inclusion to human-centred digital governance for sustainable development.

26. The UNU Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS), located in Bonn, addresses the challenges of global environmental change, with a focus on human vulnerability and the interplay between ecological and societal factors. The institute's research and educational programmes focused on climate change, sustainable development and artificial intelligence governance. Its flagship project examined climate-induced losses in informal urban settlements, providing insights on how communities cope with climate-related impacts. Findings from the project were presented at multiple global forums. UNU-EHS also collaborated on an initiative to introduce the livelihood protection policy, a microinsurance product for the agriculture, fisheries and tourism sectors in the Caribbean. In addition, it co-led a relocation simulation project that explored relocation strategies in response to climate risks, and contributed to the *United Nations World Water Development Report*. Key publications included a co-authored policy brief on ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction and a report on flood risk vulnerabilities and adaption strategies in central Viet Nam. UNU-EHS contributed to major events such as the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, and the expert meeting on artificial intelligence and climate in Bonn.

27. The UNU Institute for Integrated Management of Material Fluxes and of Resources (UNU-FLORES), located in Dresden, Germany, contributes to the sustainable use and integrated management of environmental resources such as water, soil and waste. In 2024, UNU-FLORES continued to advance its mission by leading transformative projects and strategic collaborations. A highlight was the Living Art of Building initiative, aimed at fostering climate-neutral and resource-efficient construction practices. Research efforts included a major study on the resource nexus concept and a collaborative review of the potential of nature-based solutions and citizen science to transform agrifood systems. The institute also helped to organize an international workshop on post-mining landscape restoration in collaboration with the Group of 20 Global Land Initiative. UNU-FLORES expanded its educational impact through its joint Master's programme on water security and global change, part of the partnership with the Global Water and Climate Adaptation Centre – Aachen, Bangkok, Chennai, Dresden (ABCD-Centre), and continued to build capacity with its collaborative doctoral programme on the integrated management of environmental resources with Technische Universität Dresden.

28. The UNU Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS), located in Tokyo, engages in activities that help to achieve a more sustainable future, with a focus on transformations towards sustainable societies, natural capital and biodiversity, and global change and resilience. In 2024, UNU-IAS co-chaired the Higher Education for Sustainability Initiative and co-organized its global forum, a special event of the United Nations high-level political forum on sustainable development, on how emerging technologies can enhance sustainability in higher education. The institute contributed to the UNESCO World Conference on Culture and Arts Education, presenting its project on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in Luang Prabang, Lao People's Democratic Republic. At the twenty-ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, UNU-IAS co-organized a side event on synergies between climate and the Goals and delivered delegate training through a capacity-building hub. It also launched the Net Zero 101 e-learning course with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, advanced the Satoyama Development Mechanism (which supports biodiversity and sustainable land management), researched the benefits of urban green spaces in Japan, examined Goal interactions with decarbonization and

digital transformation as part of the climate action policy dialogue, and launched a youth empowerment programme. Key publications included a policy brief on decarbonizing food systems and a co-edited book on climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

29. The UNU International Institute for Global Health (UNU-IIGH), located in Kuala Lumpur, advances evidence-based policy on key health issues, with a focus on gender mainstreaming in health systems and supporting decision makers in the global South. UNU-IIGH launched its strategic plan for 2024–2028, prioritizing gender equality, climate justice, power and accountability, and capacity strengthening in global health. The institute's work emphasized decolonizing global health governance and promoted a feminist policy framework calling for intersectional approaches, investment in women's health and support for grass-roots feminist organizations. Other UNU-IIGH research focused on accountability in global health governance, especially regarding powerful private actors. Collaborative projects included catalysing policy improvement in Africa to address maternal and newborn health. A focus on the role of technology in addressing health disparities was central to regional workshops and digital health governance efforts. The institute targeted capacity-building in the global South through online courses, mentorship and partnerships, with an emphasis on gender-responsive health systems. Key publications included papers on global health governance, gender equality and the decolonization of global health.

30. The UNU Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (UNU-INRA), located in Accra, provides cutting-edge knowledge about sustainable responses to the challenges of natural resources management in Africa. In 2024, UNU-INRA remained focused on promoting environmental sustainability, enhancing community capacity and driving economic growth aligned with climate goals. Its flagship Innovate for Clean Agricultural Technologies (INFoCAT) project helps to empower women and young people in targeted countries in Africa through clean energy agricultural technologies; in 2024, this included hosting capacity-building workshops to support agricultural technology innovators. Another major project focuses on enhancing reforestation and resource management in Ghana through community-led governance structures. Two key publications examined carbon market economies and stranded assets in the context of an equitable and sustainable transition to a low-carbon economy.

31. The UNU Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH), located in Richmond Hill, Canada, analyses and synthesises existing knowledge on water challenges, identifies emerging policy issues and develops scalable solutions. In 2024, UNU-INWEH established several strategic partnerships, including a landmark agreement with Tajikistan to collaborate on water, health, climate change and sustainability transitions. The project on accelerating the implementation of water-related Goals remained a core initiative of the institute, with its policy support system for Goal 6 now used by over 60 countries. Other projects focused on behavioural approaches to enhance water security in Africa and on nature-based solutions for drought resilience. Collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Inter-American Development Bank led to the development of a water information management system for the Caribbean. The publication *Unmasking the Unseen* examined the gendered impacts of water quality. Other reports focused on the use of artificial intelligence for climate impact assessments and on evaporative water losses from dam reservoirs. UNU-INWEH organized capacity-building workshops in Africa centred on climate risk management and contributed to establishing a UNU hub at Hamburg University of Technology to focus on climate challenges and innovation.

32.   The UNU Institute in Macau (UNU-Macau), located in Macau, Special Administrative Region of China, conducts policy-relevant research on digital technologies and the Goals to support evidence-based, knowledge-driven and participatory decision-making. In 2024, UNU-Macau positioned itself as a leader in leveraging artificial intelligence for sustainable development by hosting a conference on artificial intelligence (on the theme "AI for All"), at which key stakeholders developed policy guidelines for synthetic data use and launched the UNU Global Artificial Intelligence Network. The institute also promoted digital inclusion through a summer camp focused on digital technologies in health policies. In collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), UNU-Macau advanced research on digital security and addressed the gender biases present in artificial intelligence, with a focus on women's security. UNU-Macau partnered with other United Nations system entities to further promote the role of artificial intelligence in improving education, combating wildlife crime and advancing the Goals in industry. The institute actively contributed to the global discourse on artificial intelligence for sustainable development and published research on artificial intelligence ethics, digital well-being and information and communications technology security, emphasizing the importance of equitable digital transformation.

33.   The UNU Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT), located in Maastricht, Kingdom of the Netherlands, explores the social, political and economic factors that drive technological innovation. In 2024, UNU-MERIT strengthened partnerships with key organizations to deliver new insights on innovation and development. Notable collaborations included a joint report on financing social protection in Asia and the Pacific, a study on the role of internationally mobile scientists in global research networks and research on industrial strategies for the twenty-first century. UNU-MERIT formalized its partnership with the World Intellectual Property Organization, integrating its Master's programme into the Organization's Academy, and worked with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on the mother-and-child cash transfer programme in Afghanistan. The diploma programme on migration management, targeted at mid-level migration professionals, remained the flagship initiative of UNU-MERIT. Other educational offerings included a Doctor of Philosophy degree in international development, a Master of Science degree in public policy and human development and a summer school on economic fitness and complexity. Among UNU-MERIT publications was an influential paper on the impact of rising temperatures on migration in rural India. In parallel, UNU-MERIT and the Rectorate revised the collaboration agreement with the University of Maastricht, which accounts for the majority of the institute's personnel.

34.   The UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), located in Helsinki, focuses on the complex, interlinked development challenges of transforming economies, States and societies. In 2024, UNU-WIDER contributed to poverty reduction and sustainable development through the second phase of its flagship domestic revenue mobilization programme. This initiative supports countries in the global South in enhancing their tax systems and increasing domestic revenue. The programme advanced research on tax benefit policies aimed at reducing poverty and inequality, with notable uptake in countries such as Uganda. The programme's research fed into the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development. Other notable projects included strengthening safety nets in post-conflict and humanitarian contexts, which focuses on cash transfers and social protection in countries in Africa, and the Southern Africa – Towards Inclusive Economic Development project, which fosters collaboration between academic institutions and Governments to support policy reforms in areas such as job creation, public revenue and climate resilience. The institute launched a new initiative aimed

at reforming the global financial system to better serve developing nations and contributed to the *Development Co-operation Report 2024* of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development by providing insights on tackling poverty and inequality through the green transition.

35. A noteworthy initiative of 2024 was the launch of a new network of UNU hubs to expand and complement the work of UNU research institutes. Each UNU hub is a partnership between one or more UNU institutes and a leading university, focusing on critical global challenges – ranging from urban sustainability and climate adaptation to engineering solutions and water issues – with a particular emphasis on addressing the needs of the global South. Four UNU hubs were established in 2024 at leading universities in Canada, Germany, Sweden and the United States of America, with more planned in the future. These hubs integrate research, training and outreach to cultivate future leaders, create opportunities for students and researchers to engage with the United Nations system, and deliver policy-relevant solutions.

IV. Delivering policy-relevant, solution-focused research

36. At the core of the University's mission is the commitment to conduct rigorous evidence-based, policy-relevant research on today's most pressing global challenges. The aim is not just to develop a theoretical understanding or generate "knowledge for the sake of knowledge", but to infuse scientific expertise into policymaking, decision-making and public discourse by providing pragmatic, policy-relevant insights.

37. There is growing demand for evidence-based research within the United Nations system and other policymaking venues, but significant barriers – inaccessibility of findings, timing mismatches, political or institutional constraints, lack of trust and resource limitations – often prevent its effective uptake. UNU works to bridge the research-policy gap created by these barriers through three key vectors:

(a) Direct engagement: UNU leverages its status as a United Nations system entity to establish trust with key United Nations actors, including the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and other Secretariat bodies. Through this trust, UNU is able to undertake sensitive research and convene policy discussions, even in politically delicate contexts, playing a vital role in inter-agency networks;

(b) Indirect analytical influence: the University's research generates critical evidence and fresh perspectives that help to shape discourse and debate on complex issues, especially in areas requiring interdisciplinary enquiry. This research informs decision-making, influences public debate and provides new angles for addressing global challenges;

(c) Collaborative knowledge generation: UNU partners with other United Nations entities to co-create tailored, policy-relevant outputs that address specific knowledge gaps, ensuring that its research is both timely and directly applicable to ongoing United Nations priorities and global needs.

38. UNU research supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Goals. The University's holistic approach brings together interdisciplinary expertise to address individual Goals and illuminate their interconnections across sectors and disciplines to develop comprehensive solutions.

39. In 2024, UNU undertook some 218 projects,[4] a selection of which are presented below under the "five Ps" of sustainable development: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnerships.

_____

[4] Many of the projects described in the present report were undertaken in collaboration with, or funded by, various stakeholders who, because of space limitations, are not always named.

A.   People

40.   Five closely connected Goals work together to ensure that all people, everywhere, can lead healthy, fulfilling lives: Goal 1 on ending poverty, Goal 2 on ending hunger, Goal 3 on good health and well-being, Goal 4 on quality education and Goal 5 on gender equality. UNU research addresses the root causes that hinder individuals in reaching their full potential. By exploring the systemic challenges behind poverty, hunger, gender-based inequality and lack of access to health and education, UNU contributes to creating pathways for lasting, positive change.

41.   The UNU-BIOLAC biotechnology and development research project addresses critical health challenges such as microbial resistance and viral diseases.

42.   UNU-CRIS published a policy brief on the threats to a cosmopolitan society, highlighting the dangers of historical amnesia and biased narratives in shaping contemporary political and social divisions.

43.   UNU-EHS assessed the impact of World Food Programme climate adaptation investments on food security in drought-sensitive regions of the Niger, providing key insights to optimize food aid interventions in response to climate challenges.

44.   UNU-EGOV is conducting research aimed at increasing citizen participation in digital health initiatives in Brazil, focusing on inclusivity and accessibility for all citizens.

45.   UNU-IIGH is working to enhance healthcare quality for marginalized communities and addresses structural and gender inequalities in healthcare systems.

46.   UNU-INWEH published a report that examines the disproportionate negative effects of water and sanitation issues on women and girls.

47.   UNU-Macau has partnered with UN-Women to strengthen digital security for gender equality advocates in South-East Asia by providing tools and support to protect them from cyberthreats.

48.   UNU-MERIT, in collaboration with UNICEF, is exploring the effectiveness of cash transfer programmes in improving child health outcomes and reducing poverty in Ghana. The UNU-MERIT diploma programme in migration management, meanwhile, offers specialized training to mid-level migration professionals from developing and emerging economies to enhance their policy formulation and management skills.

49.   UNU-VIE is promoting sustainable livelihoods in rural communities in the Niger by providing access to renewable energy and enhancing agricultural practices to improve income generation.

50.   The UNU-WIDER SOUTHMOD project facilitated tax benefit microsimulation models in 13 developing countries, helping policymakers to design equitable tax and social protection policies that reduce poverty and inequality. Another UNU-WIDER project assesses the impact of cash transfer programmes on economic resilience in selected countries in Africa, providing evidence to enhance social safety nets in crisis settings.

B.   Prosperity

51.   Building on the people-centric Goals, five additional Goals focus on fostering social prosperity and stability: Goal 7 on affordable and clean energy, Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth, Goal 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, Goal 10 on reduced inequalities and Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities.

UNU research helps to create the foundations for just and resilient economies, infrastructure and urban spaces, with a strong emphasis on addressing the root causes of inequality and instability.

52. UNU-CPR conducted a critical analysis of the global South's proposals for reforming the international financial architecture, aiming to promote more equitable financial systems and shape political priorities for forthcoming international summits.

53. UNU-EGOV is conducting a project aimed at enhancing the institutional capacity of Portugal for sustainable digital governance. UNU-EGOV is also supporting the Government of Saudi Arabia in its quest to develop user-friendly, accessible platforms that can improve digital government services.

54. UNU-FLORES helped to promote sustainable practices in the textile sector in Bangladesh through its Chair for Sustainability and Textile Innovation by developing curricula and e-learning tools.

55. UNU-IIGH is investigating the governance of private for-profit actors in global health, examining their influence on health outcomes and their role in health system governance.

56. UNU-INRA is empowering women and young agricultural technology innovators in three African countries by promoting clean energy-powered agricultural technologies that can enhance smallholders' productivity.

57. UNU-MERIT cooperated on a project that supported financing strategies for social protection reform with the aim of helping developing countries in Asia and the Pacific to achieve the Goals.

58. UNU-WIDER is spearheading a project aimed at reforming the international financial architecture to create a fairer, more equitable system that addresses the needs of countries in the global South.

59. UNU-WIDER also supported tax policy reforms in four African countries, aiming to strengthen tax systems and enhance governance to promote sustainable development, and contributed to the *Development Co-operation Report 2024* of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, emphasizing the need for a just green transition that ensures benefits for the poorest and most vulnerable populations.

C. Planet

60. Five of the Goals are aimed at mitigating the impact of human activity on the Earth's finite resources and protect its biodiversity: Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation, Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production, Goal 13 on climate action, Goal 14 on life below water and Goal 15 on life on land. UNU research explores innovative solutions that promote human well-being while respecting environmental limits, ensuring the protection of the planet's natural heritage for future generations.

61. UNU-CRIS is evaluating the environmental consequences of trade agreements and providing recommendations to balance economic growth with environmental sustainability.

62. UNU-EHS is examining how artificial intelligence can improve early warning systems and support climate adaptation and transformation efforts. UNU-EHS is also collaborating on a project aimed at strengthening climate risk adaptation and insurance strategies in the Caribbean, with the goal of enhancing resilience against climate-related disasters.

63. UNU-FLORES is participating in the Living Art of Building initiative, which is aimed at transforming the construction sector by promoting sustainability and international collaboration in building practices. UNU-FLORES also co-organized a workshop on post-mining landscape restoration, with a focus on promoting sustainable land use and environmental resilience in developing nations.

64. A UNU-IAS project addresses the underrepresentation of young people in global environmental policy by providing training and opportunities to contribute to biodiversity and environmental decision-making processes.

65. As the secretariat of the International Satoyama Initiative, UNU-IAS mobilizes global partnerships for biodiversity and human-nature relationships. The institute also assesses biodiversity, carbon sequestration and heat island reduction in urban gardens and sacred forests in Japan, with the aim of contributing to policies on nature-based solutions.

66. UNU-INRA research highlights priorities for reversing environmental degradation in Africa, advocating for sustainable practices to restore ecosystems and natural resources. A UNU-INRA collaborative project addresses deforestation and promotes environmental sustainability in Ghana by building local capacity for natural resource management.

67. UNU-INWEH is collaboratively developing a system to improve water resource management in the wider Caribbean region.

D. Peace

68. Safety, human rights and good governance are the cornerstones of the sustainable development agenda. Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions focuses on fostering peaceful, inclusive societies and promoting international cooperation. UNU research contributes to developing solutions for building effective, accountable governance systems, ensuring the rule of law, preventing violence and cultivating harmony within and between nations.

69. UNU-CPR conducted a thematic review exploring how human rights tools can enhance conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategies, providing valuable insights for policymakers working in post-conflict and fragile States.

70. UNU-CPR also conducted research on the integration of human rights into peacebuilding projects supported by the Peacebuilding Fund. The effort highlighted the critical role that human rights play in advancing conflict prevention and sustainable peace efforts.

71. UNU-CPR examined the role of artificial intelligence technologies in shaping peace and conflict, with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa, providing a critical analysis of the region's digital landscape and its implications for peacebuilding.

72. UNU-EGOV is helping the Government of Guinea-Bissau to create a road map for modernizing the nation's public sector and digital services.

73. UNU-Macau and UN-Women are collaborating on a project that addresses the unique challenges that women face in the digital world, with a focus on enhancing their information and communications technology security. Another UNU-Macau project explores how advancements in artificial intelligence affect security and peacebuilding for women.

E. Partnerships

74. Achieving the Goals requires a global, unified response that spans Governments, the private sector and civil society. Goal 17 on partnerships for the Goals emphasizes the need to strengthen the means of implementation and renew collaborative efforts. With its wide-ranging expertise across all Goals and active partnerships across sectors, UNU serves as a collaborative hub, facilitating knowledge exchange and bringing together diverse stakeholders to advance sustainable development.

75. UNU-CPR and UNU-EGOV collaborated with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on a data deep dive with African experts and government officials to explore structural elements from the zero draft of the Global Digital Compact, with the aim of contributing to the future digital governance framework for Africa.

76. UNU-CRIS participated in the annual meeting of the Academic Council on the United Nations System in 2024, focusing on the topic of global governance and sustainable development, with the aim of fostering dialogue and collaboration with international academics and policymakers.

77. UNU-CRIS contributed to the policy dialogue on environmental changes and climate resilience aimed at fostering interregional cooperation between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union.

78. UNU-EHS partnered with the secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification on the World Drought Atlas project, raising awareness of drought risks and impacts and contributing data and insights for better drought management and resilience strategies.

79. UNU-EGOV worked with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on the 2024 United Nations e-government survey, focusing on an index to enhance local digital governance and e-service delivery, and with the Department and ECA to foster digital transformation through regional cooperation in Africa.

80. UNU-IAS collaborated with partners across the United Nations system during the twenty-ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to influence policy dialogue, with a special focus on climate-sustainability synergies and aligning climate action with the Goals.

81. UNU-IIGH co-hosted a forum on the global digital future that focused on the future of digital governance and technological advancements.

82. UNU-INWEH is working with UNEP and the Inter-American Development Bank to develop a water information management system for the wider Caribbean region, aiming to improve water resource management through better data-sharing and analysis. In addition, UNU-INWEH is partnering with Tajikistan to foster academic and scientific collaboration, specifically addressing issues of water security and climate change.

83. UNU-MERIT partnered with the Asian Development Bank to produce a report on financing strategies for social protection, aimed at supporting the achievement of the Goals in developing countries across Asia and the Pacific.

84. UNU-Macau and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization co-hosted a side event at the AIM Global Conference exploring how artificial intelligence can drive sustainable development in industry and manufacturing.

85. UNU-VIE collaborated on an initiative aimed at strengthening leadership in climate action at the local and sectoral levels, in particular in the global South. UNU-VIE also collaborated with various partners to support green entrepreneurship in Africa, with a particular emphasis on empowering women and young people.

V. Empowering the global South

86. At the core of the University's work is a commitment to the global South, as articulated in its Charter mandate to support "the continuing growth of vigorous academic and scientific communities … particularly in the developing countries". This commitment is realized, in part, by helping researchers and academics from developing countries to access and contribute to global knowledge networks and policy processes.

87. Throughout 2024, the University's global network of institutes also ensured that their work explicitly addressed the needs of the global South through a range of targeted research projects and educational initiatives. The focus is on empowering developing nations to meet their unique challenges through education, building collaborative research networks and supporting policy development.

88. UNU institutes have worked extensively to create platforms that enhance academic exchange and research capacity in the global South. Initiatives such as UNU-BIOLAC training courses in Latin America and the Caribbean and the UNU-FLORES joint Master's programme on water security and global change highlight the University's dedication to advancing academic opportunities and technical skills in developing countries, promoting knowledge transfer and enhancing the mobility of scholars within and beyond the global South.

89. A common theme across the University's efforts has been the strengthening of institutional partnerships. For example, UNU-CRIS collaborated with institutions in Colombia, Mexico and Thailand to establish new training programmes and hubs for regional cooperation. Similarly, UNU-INWEH led the establishment of the African Academy for Water, Environment and Health, which will train emerging scholars and practitioners to address pressing climate and environmental challenges.

90. UNU also supported policy development in developing countries through initiatives that seek to align national policies with global goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals. UNU-EGOV work in Guinea-Bissau, which included the development of a national strategy for digital transformation, and its collaboration with ECA to support digital governance in South and East Africa are prime examples of the University's role in strengthening governance structures in the global South. UNU-CPR and UNU-IAS, meanwhile, focused on empowering local stakeholders by engaging them directly in policy discussions, thereby amplifying their voices on global platforms.

91. Another important trend has been the University's role in addressing specific challenges faced by developing countries, such as climate change, health inequalities and urban vulnerabilities. UNU-EHS assessments of informal urban settlements in Brazil, Indonesia and Kenya highlighted the need to address loss and damage in vulnerable areas. UNU-IIGH focused on gender-based health challenges through initiatives such as the African Community of Practice on Gender and Health, facilitating webinars on gender-based violence and promoting best practices across the continent.

92. The University's capacity-building efforts in the global South are further underscored by an emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility. UNU-Macau, for example, offered scholarships for students from developing countries to attend its conference on artificial intelligence, while UNU-WIDER supported domestic revenue mobilization and tax benefit modelling in several African nations. These efforts not only enhanced local knowledge but also supported evidence-based policymaking in critical areas of development.

93. In addition, it should be noted that, at the end of 2024, 45 per cent of UNU personnel were nationals of developing countries, as were 41 per cent of Master of Science students and 70 per cent of Doctor of Philosophy candidates enrolled in UNU postgraduate degree programmes. Many of these students benefited from financial support through UNU fellowships and scholarships, ensuring that opportunities for higher education and research remain accessible to those from the global South.

VI. Leveraging United Nations system alliances

94. To amplify the impact of its research, UNU collaborates extensively with various United Nations entities, including the United Nations Secretariat, agencies, programmes, commissions and convention secretariats. These partnerships within the United Nations system ensure that UNU research is effectively translated into real-world policies and practices that align with global priorities. Furthermore, through its privileged access to Member States and its participation in the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, UNU is able to apprise global research communities of the evolving needs of United Nations policymakers and connect them with the relevant system entities.

95. A significant portion of the University's collaboration within the United Nations system in 2024 focused on climate resilience, sustainable resource management and environmental policy. For example, UNU-CPR worked with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to support the implementation of the Goals through the Scientific Advisory Board. UNU-CRIS partnered with the European Union-Latin America and the Caribbean Foundation to facilitate policy dialogues on climate cooperation between Latin America and the European Union. UNU-EHS worked with the secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification to co-organize a Science, Technology and Innovation Day at the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. UNU-INRA collaborated with the United Nations Development Programme, UNEP, UNICEF and the World Health Organization on sustainable forest management in Ghana, and UNU-INWEH worked with UNEP on developing a water information management system for the wider Caribbean region.

96. UNU partnered extensively with other United Nations system entities to advance global health and gender equality. UNU-IIGH collaborated with civil society stakeholders and several United Nations entities through its gender and health hub to promote gender-responsive health policies. UNU-INRA and UN-Women co-organized a side event at the twenty-ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to advocate for a rights-based energy transition, and UNU-Macau partnered with UN-Women on digital security projects for gender equality advocates.

97. In the realm of digital governance and innovation, UNU-EGOV partnered with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to evaluate and improve local-level e-government services and with ECA to establish the South and East Africa Digital Governance Forum. UNU-Macau worked with UNESCO to develop a webinar on generative artificial intelligence in education.

98. UNU demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting and building capacity in the least developed countries. UNU-WIDER collaborated with the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States to organize the Least Developed Country Future Forums, and UNU-MERIT partnered with UNICEF to implement the mother-and-child cash transfer social protection programme in Afghanistan.

99.   UNU also contributed to the *United Nations World Water Development Report*, worked on developing a forthcoming report on water, sanitation and disaster risk reduction and co-chaired the Higher Education for Sustainability Initiative. Other notable UNU partnerships included collaborating with a regional body on environmental and climate change solutions in Latin America and the Caribbean, supporting social protection reform in Asia through partnership with a regional development bank and working with a Caribbean climate risk pool to develop climate risk adaptation and insurance solutions.

100.   These partnerships and collaborative efforts in 2024 underscored the University's role as a catalyst for collective action, thereby expanding its influence and capacity to create meaningful change.

VII.   Bringing United Nations University research to diverse audiences

101.   UNU maximizes its impact by disseminating evidence-based knowledge through diverse channels. Expert publications provide groundbreaking insights on critical global issues, while UNU events convene stakeholders worldwide to exchange ideas, build partnerships and drive collective action. The University's specialized training programmes equip practitioners and researchers with the skills needed to tackle complex challenges, and UNU briefings guide decision makers through intricate policy landscapes. Mass media coverage and robust online outreach further extend the University's visibility.

102.   This comprehensive approach positions UNU as a leading knowledge broker and catalyst for solutions, seamlessly bridging the worlds of scholarship, practice and policy to generate a meaningful, sustainable impact.

A.   Publications

103.   The University's thought leadership spans a diverse range of publishing platforms, combining self-published works (such as reports, policy briefs, working papers and website articles) with contributions to external publications (including books, book chapters, peer-reviewed journals, blogs and major news outlets). This dynamic multimedia approach ensures that UNU research effectively reaches key audiences – policymakers, practitioners, academics, affected communities and the broader public – in a timely and impactful manner.

104.   The University's growing portfolio of publications highlights practical solutions for some of humanity's most pressing challenges. In 2024, UNU researchers contributed to 29 books and published 342 peer-reviewed articles in scientific journals, 152 working or discussion papers, 103 research or technical documents and 118 policy papers. More than 8,700 UNU publications (including over more than 360 published in 2024) can be downloaded free-of-charge through the online UNU Collections repository.

105.   Notable publications to which UNU institutes or researchers contributed in 2024 are listed below.

Books

- *Climate Change in Regional Perspective* (UNU-CRIS)

- *COVID-19 and the Informal Economy: Impact, Recovery and the Future* (UNU-WIDER)

- *Linking Climate Change Adaptation, Disaster Risk Reduction, and Loss & Damage* (UNU-IAS)

Reports

- *Assembly for Peace: A Digital Handbook on the UN General Assembly's Past Practice on Peace and Security* (UNU-CPR)

- *Connecting the Dots: The Role of Internationally Mobile Scientists in Linking Nonmobile with Foreign Scientists* (UNU-MERIT)

- *Costing Social Protection Reform for Asia and the Pacific* (UNU-MERIT)

- *Environmental Impact Assessment of Trade Agreements* (UNU-CRIS)

- *Flood Risks in Hue, Central Viet Nam* (UNU-EHS)

- "Stranded assets: counting the costs" (UNU-INRA)

- "UN peace operations and human rights" (UNU-CPR)

- "Water pollution impacts on public health" (UNU-INWEH)

Briefs

- "Ecosystem-based approaches for integrating disaster risk reduction, climate, land, and biodiversity goals" (UNU-EHS)

- "Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals" (UNU-CRIS)

- "Responsible and inclusive urban AI" (UNU-EGOV)

- "T20 policy brief on an international decade of data" (UNU-CPR)

Papers

- "Artificial intelligence and the women, peace and security agenda in South-East Asia" (UNU-Macau)

- "Comparative analysis of water sustainability indices" (UNU-IAS)

- "Developing an agenda for the decolonization of global health" (UNU-IIGH)

- "Governing in the digital age: the emergence of dynamic smart urban governance modes" (UNU-EGOV)

- "How can urban governance better respond to climate risks in the global South?" (UNU-CRIS)

- "Taxing top incomes in the emerging world: economic impact under the microscope" (UNU-WIDER)

B. Events

106. Events are vital to amplifying the impact and reach of UNU research. They provide platforms for presenting evidence-based solutions, fostering interactive engagement between scholarship and practice and breaking down academic silos through direct collaboration and dialogue. In 2024, UNU organized more than 830 events – including seminars, conferences, symposiums and lectures – of which 42 per cent were held wholly or partially online. These gatherings engaged diverse audiences, with many open to the public and others tailored to specialized groups.

107. Notable and impactful events organized or co-organized by UNU in 2024 included:

- Webinar on biotechnology for policymakers in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNU-BIOLAC)

- Expert meeting on artificial intelligence and climate in Bonn (UNU-EHS)

- Greenovations Collaboration Forum (UNU-VIE)

- International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance (UNU-EGOV)

- Panel discussion on international financial architecture reform (UNU-CPR and UNU-WIDER)

- Sixth Kwapong lecture, on the theme "Green wins: fostering a better dialogue towards sustainable, inclusive natural resource governance" (UNU-INRA)

- South and East Africa Digital Governance Forum (UNU-EGOV)

- Conference on artificial intelligence (UN-Macau)

- Webinar entitled "What does a gender-just climate transition mean for health systems in Africa?" (UNU-IIGH)

- Annual lecture entitled "The billionaire tax: a (modest) proposal for the 21st century" (UNU-WIDER)

- Development conference entitled "The world at crossroads: securing the future generations" (UNU-WIDER)

C. Postgraduate education and specialized training

108. UNU empowers future leaders through immersive degree programmes that address critical global challenges. UNU offers three Master of Science programmes – on the geography of environmental risks and human security (in Bonn, through UNU-EHS and the University of Bonn), public policy and human development (in Maastricht, through UNU-MERIT and Maastricht University) and sustainability (in Tokyo, through UNU-IAS) – and three Doctor of Philosophy programmes – on the integrated management of water, soil and waste (in Dresden, through UNU-FLORES and Technische Universität Dresden), innovation, economics and governance for development (in Maastricht, through UNU-MERIT) and sustainability science (in Tokyo, through UNU-IAS).

109. In 2024, 321 students were enrolled in these programmes (141 Master's and 180 doctoral candidates); 54 per cent were from (46) developing countries and 64 per cent were women.

110. UNU also offers dozens of specialized non-degree training opportunities each year, ranging from one-day workshops to multi-week courses, on a wide range of UNU focus areas. In 2024, UNU organized or co-organized 173 such training sessions (47 per cent of which were conducted wholly or partially online), with more than 31,600 participants.

111. Some UNU institutes also provide research-based training, allowing young scholars and researchers to enhance their skills and augment their knowledge by collaborating directly with UNU experts.

D. Briefings and presentations

112. UNU provides science-based counsel to key actors navigating complex challenges at the intersection of peace, development and governance by providing authoritative briefings to intergovernmental bodies, government agencies and other influential stakeholders, in particular on frontier issues. Located near United Nations Headquarters, UNU-CPR can actively share its research and policy recommendations with key United Nations system audiences and government officials.

113. In 2024, UNU-CPR representatives participated in the Global Citizen NOW sessions on health and climate financing, engaging with ministers from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Finland on international financial reform. UNU-CPR also co-organized a data governance event for African experts with ECA and UNU-EGOV, contributed to the Aswan Forum by leading a round table on strengthening peacebuilding in Africa, presented research reports and policy handbooks to United Nations entities and government officials and supported the High-level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence on global artificial intelligence governance frameworks.

E. Mass media coverage and online outreach

114. UNU leverages mass media, online platforms and social networks to amplify awareness and engagement with its work, thereby extending its influence beyond academic and policy spheres to reach diverse audiences around the globe, as described below:

(a) Mass media: In 2024, thousands of articles about UNU and its research were published worldwide by online news sites, blogs, forums and newspapers. Coverage was primarily in Chinese, English, Japanese and Spanish;

(b) Web platform: UNU has strengthened its online presence through an expanded and integrated web platform launched in the spring of 2023, which at the end of 2024 encompassed the UNU Centre, UNU-VIE and 10 of the 13 institutes. The platform, which provides a centralized access point to UNU news, research and publications, has improved user experience and increased accessibility for global audiences. UNU websites on the platform received more than 1.7 million page views in 2024;

(c) Social media: UNU intensified its social media presence in 2024, with an active presence on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and X. Through campaign-focused posts on social media, UNU shares regular research insights, event highlights and video content with a global audience;

(d) Newsletter: the UNU monthly email newsletter, "Insights", provides a curated selection of news, articles and publications, with consistently high open rates and positive reader feedback. Several UNU institutes also publish regular online newsletters.

Annex

Members of the Council of the United Nations University

Appointed members[1]

Funmi Olonisakin (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), Chair – Vice-President, Vice-Principal International and Professor of Security, Leadership and Development, King's College London

Yamini Aiyar (India) – Public policy scholar and former President of the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi

Sir Hilary Beckles (Barbados) – Vice-Chancellor, University of the West Indies

Denisa Čiderová (Slovakia) – Associate Professor, Department of International Trade and Liaison for Idea Puzzle, University of Economics, Bratislava

Comfort Ero (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) – President and Chief Executive Officer, International Crisis Group

Xin Fang (China) – Professor, University of the Chinese Academy of Sciences

Adam Habib (South Africa) – Director, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

Catherine Kyobutungi (Uganda) – Executive Director, African Population and Health Research Center

Kuni Sato (Japan) – Adviser, East Japan Railway Trading Co., Ltd., and National Institutes for Cultural Heritage

Vanessa Scherrer (France) – Chief Executive Officer, National Foundation, Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris

Mónica Serrano (Mexico) – Research Professor, Centre for International Studies, Colegio de México

Brenda Yeoh (Singapore) – Raffles Professor of Social Sciences, National University of Singapore

Ex officio members

Rector of the United Nations University

Secretary-General of the United Nations

Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Executive Director of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research

––––––––––––––––

---

[1] For profiles of the current Council members, see https://unu.edu/about/unu-council.