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*Introduction of Report of the Council of the
United Nations University on the work of the University
[E/2025/49](#)*

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

Mr Vice-President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, it is my honour to introduce the *Report of the Council of the United Nations University on the work of the University E/2025/49* on behalf of UNU Rector and Under-Secretary-General, Professor Tshilidzi Marwala.

INTRODUCTION

- Thanks to the generous support of the Government of Japan, UNU launched its academic work in 1975. Fifty years later, UNU is now a well-established global system of research and training institutes coordinated by UNU headquarters in Tokyo.
- UNU takes pride in its role as the knowledge partner of the United Nations. For the past 50 years our research has informed policymaking at an international level and promoted positive global change. The research carried out by UNU institutes and operating units addresses every Sustainable Development Goal, with most of our projects contributing to multiple Goals.
- As an integral part of the United Nations System, UNU's work is guided principally by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.
- UNU operates independently of the United Nations' regular budget, relying solely on voluntary contributions. These come primarily in the form of institutional funding and donations designated for specific research projects.
- The UNU research programme encompasses a wide range of issues within three broad thematic clusters: peace and security; social change and economic development; and environment, climate and energy. The focus is on three priority areas — Knowledge, Partnerships, and Impact — particularly in the Global South.
- UNU's academic freedom allows it to effectively bridge the expertise of academic communities and the policy needs of the United Nations.
- UNU is a global institution, with 13 research centres and offices generously hosted in Japan, Malaysia, China, Finland, Germany, The Netherlands, Portugal, Belgium, Ghana, Venezuela, Switzerland and Canada.
- At a time when the world urgently needs evidence-based solutions, UNU stands at the intersection of research, policy and practice. To confront today's multifaceted global challenges, we need cutting-edge research and education that empowers action. UNU delivers this in a number of ways, delivering both global policy and local impact:
 - Firstly, it is a global network for solutions-focused research, generating research to encourage the rethinking of existing policies and perspectives. We work with leading



universities and research institutes, functioning as a bridge between the international academic community and the United Nations system.

- Second, UNU is a think tank for the UN System. Our research informs policymaking at an international level and promotes positive global change.
- Thirdly, UNU is a university in the traditional sense, as we offer a variety of postgraduate training and capacity development opportunities. These range from accredited postgraduate degree programmes to in-depth, specialized training via custom-designed courses and workshops. Through our postgraduate teaching activities, UNU also contributes to capacity-building, particularly in developing countries.

RECENT NOTABLE DEVELOPMENTS

Mr Vice President, a number of important developments took place over the past year. These are detailed in the Report before you, and I would like to highlight several.

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 and serve as a more dynamic model for academic institutions to engage with the United Nations. 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, with two more established this year. Hubs strengthen UNU's role as a bridge, bringing academia closer to the UN system and aligning ongoing research with global priorities

This year marks significant milestones for the UN, including the 80th anniversary of the UN Charter and also the 50th anniversary of UNU. Together with the Executive Director of UNITAR, the UNU Rector recently convened a meeting to launch the UN80 Cluster on Training and Research Task Team. The meeting marked an essential step in mobilizing coordinated action across the UN system to strengthen our collective capacity in training, research and knowledge dissemination. The Task Team is considering priorities, including enhancing collaboration between Principals and Working Level representatives, identifying opportunities for joint initiatives, and aligning efforts with the Secretary-General's broader UN80 vision for a more coherent and future-ready United Nations.

New frameworks for collaboration like UNU's Hubs are a key part of this transformation, introducing flexible, modern modalities that enhance UNU's agility and research capacity.



This is not just structural reform; it is a strategic evolution to ensure the UN remains effective and relevant.

For UNU, this means expanding access, rethinking delivery models, and focusing our research on education's contribution to sustainable development. Let me share a few examples of ongoing and new initiatives:

- At UNU Macau, our training camps teach students the technical and ethical foundations of AI for sustainable development, preparing them to use new technologies to address environmental challenges.
- At our Tokyo headquarters, we run workshops that connect young people with the work of the UN system, encouraging cross-cultural exchange and civic participation.
- At UNU-EGOV in Portugal, we help young learners navigate the risks of misinformation, while equipping public institutions with the knowledge to design inclusive digital governance systems. Its flagship initiative was a 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 SDGs and the Global Digital Compact.
- The UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), located in Helsinki, 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 to enhance their tax systems and increase domestic revenue.
- Emerging technologies feature prominently in UNU's research across various fields. Later this year, UNU will be launching its 14th institute, in Bologna, Italy, focused on the intersection of AI, big data and sustainable development.
- At UNU-CPR in New York we provide support to the Secretary-General's office, including as Research Lead for his High-Level Scientific Advisory Board, of which UNU Rector Marwala is a member.

At the core of the University's mission is a commitment to conduct rigorous evidence-based, policy-relevant research on the most pressing global challenges. Support to the Scientific Advisory Board stands as a testament to UNU's commitment to evidence-based decision-making.



CONCLUSION

UNU will continue to build upon the foundation that it has established over the past 50 years to provide education, research and evidence-based solutions for sustainable development. UNU will continue its legacy of research excellence, and with a renewed focus on three priority areas — Knowledge, Partnerships and Impact.

Mr Vice President, distinguished delegates, I thank you for the opportunity to briefly highlight recent key developments at UNU.

Thank you.

ENDS