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**ACUNS Annual Meeting 2025**  
**Global Policy Dialogue on the Triple Planetary Crisis (Climate Change,  
Biodiversity Loss, and Pollution) and Future of Environmental Governance**  
*23-25 June 2025*

**SUMMARY REPORT**



*Co-Sponsors: Global Governance Innovation Network, Academic Council on the UN System, Stimson Center, Global Challenges Foundation, United Nations University Center for Policy Research, Leiden University, Plataforma CIPÓ, Global Institute for Strategic Research, Council on Energy, Environment & Water, Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy & Development*

The 2025 Academic Council on the UN System Annual Meeting on “**Environmental Multilateralism and Human Development**,” held from 23–25 June 2025 at the University of Nairobi, featured three Global Policy Dialogue (GPD) sessions and a concluding plenary focused on the theme of “**The Triple Planetary Crisis (Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, and Pollution) and Future of Environmental Governance**” These sessions were convened with the following objectives:

- To expand the knowledge base for more capable global institutions to better cope with existing and emerging environmental challenges and to create new opportunities through effective global action, including with scholars, policy researchers and advocates, and the private sector.
- To convene leading policy researchers, practitioners, and advocates to debate and recommend specific global institutional, policy, legal, normative, and operational innovations that could follow through the agenda of the Pact for the Future, adopted by the United Nations Summit of the Future in September 2024.
- To make targeted recommendations for mobilizing support and operationalizing global environmental commitments—including the Paris Climate Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the 2030 Agenda, and others—in shifting geopolitical climates.

The GPD sessions were organized into three thematic discussions (i. Global Governance of Climate; ii. Global Governance of Biodiversity and Nature; and iii. Global Governance of Pollution and Waste) and explored the following questions:

- What are the structural drivers of the triple planetary crisis, and what political, legal, and institutional obstacles impede multilateral solutions?
- How can normative, policy, institutional, operational, and legal reforms overcome these barriers to enable effective action?
- How can GPD partners extend the Summit of the Future’s research agenda to produce innovative initiatives that mitigate climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution at scale?

## **Global Governance of Climate**

**Moderators:** **Richard Ponzio**, Global Governance Innovation Network and Stimson Center and **Maria Kisumbi**, Humanity United

**Lead-Off Speakers:** **Rebekah Shirley**, Deputy Director, World Resources Institute (WRI) Africa, **Maja Groff**, Convenor, Climate Governance Commission; **David Passarelli**, Director, UNU Centre for Policy Research; **Maria Ivanova**, Northeastern University and Co-Chair, ACUNS Annual Meeting 2025; and **Edna Ramirez Robles**, University of Guadalajara Law School (Spokesperson)

### **Overview:**

This first session focused on the governance of climate within the triple planetary crisis framework. Discussants emphasized that climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution are deeply interconnected challenges rooted in economic systems that prioritize resource extraction and short-term gains. Participants noted that while current multilateral frameworks recognize these links, implementation remains fragmented and inadequate, hampered by geopolitical tensions and the

adoption of only weak institutional reforms to date. The discussion highlighted the urgency of centering scientific evidence in decision-making, addressing socioeconomic inequalities that exacerbate environmental harm, and reforming global finance systems to prioritize resilience over profit. Debate among participants also considered whether existing institutions can deliver the necessary transformation, with some advocating for new bodies such as a UN Climate Change Council to unify reform efforts. Session contributors concluded that effective climate governance will require the rethinking of economic models, empowering frontline communities, and creating governance structures that incentivize cooperation and systemic action.

### **Challenges:**

Expert participants emphasized that entrenched systemic barriers continue to impede effective climate governance. Specific challenges identified by participants include:

- Economic systems remain rooted in material culture and extractive practices, driving emissions and resource depletion, while undermining long-term ecological and social stability.
- Multilateral climate frameworks lack effective implementation due to geopolitical competition, fragmented institutions, and weak integration of scientific evidence into policy processes.
- Socioeconomic inequalities, including indebtedness and widening wealth gaps, exacerbate vulnerability to climate impacts, while allowing wealthier actors to externalize environmental costs.
- Climate governance is undermined by free-rider challenges, as the harms of climate change do not directly affect all contributors equally, weakening incentives for collective action.
- Existing institutions fail to empower marginalized voices or embed justice into climate governance, limiting the legitimacy and effectiveness of solutions proposed at the global level.

### **Recommendations:**

Participants in the *Global Governance of Climate* session proposed the following actions to strengthen climate governance:

- **Establish a United Nations Climate Change Council:** To unify fragmented governance efforts, accelerate Paris Agreement implementation, and mobilize resources and data-sharing, the group proposed establishing a UN Climate Change Council modeled on bodies such as the Human Rights Council (*and building upon an initial concept proposed by Brazilian President Lula*).
- **Reform global financial systems:** The group emphasized the need to reform global financial systems to prioritize resilience, ecological health, and social equity over profit-driven models, redirecting capital flows to climate investments and rethinking institutions like the World Bank and IMF.
- **Center scientific evidence in decision-making processes:** In order to center scientific evidence in decision-making processes, it was emphasized that General Assembly sessions could be convened that center on tipping-point risks and integrating the latest findings into policy development at all levels.

- **Empower frontline communities and marginalized groups:** Frontline communities and marginalized groups need to be empowered through democratizing climate governance processes, ensuring that those most affected by climate change are included in decision-making forums.
- **Foster new partnerships and negotiation platforms:** To heighten the agenda on addressing the triple planetary crisis, new partnerships and negotiation platforms that enable decentralized experimentation, adaptive protocols, and rapid learning to drive scalable climate solutions across diverse contexts would create a more responsive framework.



## Global Governance of Biodiversity and Nature

**Moderators:** Sebastien Turbot, Earthna Institute, Alanna O'Malley, Leiden University, and Anja Olin-Pape, Global Challenges Foundation.

**Lead-Off Speakers:** David Obura, Founding Director, CORDIO East Africa and IPBES  
**Julia Seixas**, Nova University; **Florence Syevuo**, SDG Kenya Forum, **Sandra Tombe**, U.S. Institute for Peace; and **Viviana Porto**, Plataforma CIPÓ (Spokesperson)

### Overview:

This second session highlighted the structural challenges driving biodiversity loss and the need for transformative change in global governance to address them effectively. Participants emphasized that current economic systems prioritize short-term material gain over long-term resilience, reinforcing disconnection between people and nature, power imbalances, and environmental degradation. While multilateral frameworks exist to protect biodiversity, implementation remains weak due to limited state capacity, corporate resistance, and overreliance on consensus processes that stall ambition. Discussions also examined how migration, legal gaps, and green energy transitions can exacerbate biodiversity loss and displace communities, highlighting the need for integrated approaches. Participants concluded that reversing biodiversity decline requires reforming economic priorities to value nature, strengthening coordination across environmental regimes, and centering Indigenous and Global South leadership to ensure equitable and effective governance.

## Challenges:

Bridging the disconnect between economic systems, governance frameworks, and equitable biodiversity outcomes emerged as a critical overarching challenge. Drilling down on this theme, participants highlighted the following:

- Current economic systems prioritize short-term material gains over long-term resilience, reinforcing human domination over nature and deepening environmental degradation.
- Multilateral environmental frameworks remain poorly implemented due to limited state capacity, overreliance on consensus processes, and corporate resistance to sustainability commitments.
- International legal frameworks treat climate change and migration separately, leaving climate-displaced populations without adequate protections and failing to address interconnected impacts.
- Green energy transitions, while necessary, risk displacing local communities through extractive practices, such as critical mineral mining, raising both ethical and justice concerns.
- Corporate actors continue to externalize environmental and social costs without accountability frameworks that align private sector incentives with biodiversity protection and equitable development.

## Recommendations:

Participants in the *Global Governance of Biodiversity and Nature* session proposed the following actions to reverse biodiversity loss and strengthen global governance:

- **Reform Economic Priorities:** Participants emphasized the need to restructure economic systems to prioritize long-term resilience and sustainability over short-term material gains. This includes reforming incentives to ensure that economic activities protect natural systems and promote equitable resource distribution, thereby aligning economic development with environmental stewardship.
- **Strengthen Global Environmental Regime Coherence:** It was recommended that climate and biodiversity agendas be better integrated with migration, trade, finance, and development policies. Participants called for coordinated, cross-sectoral governance approaches that address interconnected planetary crises holistically, enabling multilateral institutions to deliver systemic solutions rather than fragmented interventions.
- **Center Indigenous and Global South Leadership:** Participants highlighted the importance of recognizing and elevating the knowledge, agency, and rights of Indigenous peoples and Global South communities. Scaling South-South cooperation was proposed as a pathway to foster shared learning, regional solidarity, and solutions grounded in local contexts and lived experiences.
- **Bridge Legal and Policy Gaps for Climate-Displaced Populations:** Recommendations included integrating climate change and migration frameworks within international law to protect climate-displaced populations. Existing regional models, such as visa-free movement protocols, could be replicated to provide practical protections and support for vulnerable communities.

- **Enhance Corporate Accountability for Biodiversity Impacts:** Participants urged the development of clear accountability frameworks to align corporate practices with sustainability goals. This includes creating incentive structures that redirect financial capital toward nature restoration and social equity, and embedding environmental costs within corporate risk assessments to drive change in private sector behavior.

## Governing Pollution and Waste

**Moderators:** Nudhara Yusuf, Global Governance Innovation Network and Stimson Center, **Diego Salama**, *Global Governance Journal*, and **Embla Bergström**, Global Challenges Foundation.

**Lead-Off Speakers:** **Franz Baumann**, President, ACUNS; **John Bellish**, Executive Director, One Earth Future Foundation; **Joris Larik**, Leiden University and Global Governance Innovation Network; **Alice Odingo**, University of Nairobi and Vice President, ACUNS; **Shuva Raha**, Council on Energy, Environment & Water; **Maria Stoicheva**, Sofia University; and **Luanda Mpungose**, South African Institute for International Affairs (Spokesperson)

### Overview:

Discussants emphasized that pollution and waste governance are shaped by structural economic systems dating back to the Industrial Revolution. While industrialization delivered significant improvements in health, education, and life expectancy, it also entrenched fossil fuel dependence and unsustainable production models, with many companies now shifting today to plastics to sustain profits. Participants highlighted that pollution and waste are fundamentally political and economic issues, driven by vested interests and global inequities, as wealthier countries often export waste to poorer regions, undermining local systems and perpetuating injustice. The session stressed that effective solutions require integrated approaches addressing production practices, ensuring dignity for waste workers, and strengthening governance frameworks to embed equity, accountability, and the use of scientific evidence in policy processes.

### Challenges:

- **Structural Economic Dependence:** Participants emphasized that pollution and waste are rooted in economic systems established during the Industrial Revolution. These systems entrenched fossil fuel use and mass production as default development pathways, creating vested interests resistant to change. The continued shift of fossil fuel companies into plastics production further exacerbates environmental degradation.
- **Weak Governance and Accountability:** The discussion highlighted that political fragmentation and institutional inertia prevent effective pollution and waste management. Despite numerous global agreements, implementation remains weak due to poor monitoring, overlapping mandates, and limited enforcement capacity. This undermines efforts to address pollution as a cross-sectoral challenge.
- **Global Waste Inequities:** Participants noted that high-income countries often export waste to lower-income nations, burdening local systems and perpetuating environmental injustice. These practices externalize environmental harms while reinforcing global economic and racial inequalities, creating health and ecological risks for vulnerable communities.

- **Stigma and Informality in Waste Work:** Waste work remains highly stigmatized, with workers denied legal recognition and protections despite their essential public health role. The informality of the sector limits fair wages, professional dignity, and sectoral efficiency, hindering equitable waste management outcomes.
- **Disconnect Between Science and Policy:** The session underscored the persistent gap between scientific evidence and policy action. Fragmented institutional structures and weak interdisciplinary advisory bodies prevent research from informing decision-making, limiting the effectiveness of governance systems in addressing pollution and waste.

### **Recommendations:**

Reflecting upon the above challenges, participants of the *Global Governance of Pollution and Waste* Global Policy Dialogue session made the following chief recommendations:

- **Finalize and Strengthen the Global Plastics Treaty with Binding Provisions:** Participants called for enforceable national and global targets to reduce plastic production, alongside upstream regulatory controls rather than downstream consumer bans. Prohibiting hazardous chemicals in plastics manufacturing was emphasized, with a responsibility chain model proposed to allocate accountability across production, distribution, use, and disposal stages. Mechanisms for technology transfer and financial support were deemed essential to ensure a just transition for countries in the Global South, avoiding further economic marginalization.
- **Democratize and Localize Waste Governance Systems:** Waste governance should be rooted in democratic principles and community participation. Recommendations included banning or penalizing transboundary waste exports and managing waste at its source to prevent environmental dumping. Formalizing waste management as dignified employment was highlighted as a critical step to ensure occupational protections, fair wages, and legal recognition for waste workers. Integrating civil society and community-based organizations into planning processes and establishing zoning regulations were proposed to prevent the environmental marginalization of low-income communities.
- **Strengthening Monitoring, Accountability, and Science-Policy Integration:** Developing clear impact assessment frameworks to track how pollution affects health, biodiversity, and food systems was seen as essential. Participants recommended aligning global and national indicators with Sustainable Development Goals, while allowing for local data collection. Strengthening science-policy advisory bodies with diverse expertise, and exploring legal approaches such as recognising the rights of nature, were also proposed to support enforcement and environmental protection.
- **Address Political Economy Barriers to Pollution and Waste Governance:** Stronger institutional safeguards are recommended to separate political and business interests in waste management, as well as for promoting transparency and accountability to dismantle networks that protect polluters. Participants emphasized that these governance reforms must prioritize environmental justice and equity, rebalance economic incentives to reflect the true costs of pollution and waste, and ensure that those most affected are included in decision-making processes.



## **Closing Plenary Session: Global Policy Dialogue Readouts & Feedback**

**Moderators:** **Richard Ponzio**, Stimson Center and Global Governance Innovation Network; and **Nudhara Yusuf**, Coalition for the UN We Need and Executive Coordinator, Global Governance Innovation Network

**Spokespersons:** **Edna Ramirez Robles**, University of Guadalajara Law School; **Viviana Porto**, Plataforma CIPÓ (readout delivered by Beatriz Abellan Merelo [Foundation for European Progressive Studies]); and **Luanda Mpungose** (readout delivered by **Renata Juliotti**, Sao Paulo [UMESP]), South African Institute for International Affairs

**Discussants:** **Ababu Namwamba**, Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations Office in Nairobi; **Peter Maddens**, Ambassador of Belgium to Kenya, Madagascar, Seychelles, Comoros, Eritrea, and Somalia; **Henk-Jan Bakker**, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Kenya, Somalia, Eritrea, and Seychelles; **Mirko Giulietti**, Ambassador of Switzerland to Kenya, Eritrea, Rwanda, Somalia, and Uganda; and **Seraphine Kando**, Human Rights Specialist, African Union Commission

The spokespersons for each session reported back on discussions from the three Global Policy Dialogue sessions held over the previous two days, highlighting key insights and recommendations. In sharing highlights from the session on pollution and waste, for instance, it was noted that while industrialization has brought significant benefits, it has also resulted in escalating ecological damage. Participants called for finalizing a strong, legally binding Global Plastics Treaty to ban harmful chemicals and implement a “responsibility chain” approach holding producers accountable across the lifecycle of plastic products. The need to democratize waste governance was emphasized, including formal recognition and support for waste workers, ending transboundary dumping, and empowering communities in decision-making. The session also highlighted the persistent science-policy divide and the importance of strengthening data systems, impact assessments, and monitoring frameworks to support effective governance. Local innovations, cultural awareness, and

justice-based transitions were identified as central to ensuring inclusive and enforceable environmental policy.

The distinguished panel of ambassadors and representatives provided detailed feedback, recognizing the urgency of enhancing global and regional governance to address these environmental challenges. They underscored the importance of environmental justice and accountability, calling for ambitious, inclusive action in upcoming negotiations and treaties. Discussants emphasized that democratizing waste governance and formalizing waste management as a dignified sector are critical steps toward building resilient and equitable societies. The panel also discussed the need to strengthen institutional frameworks to ensure enforceable and science-informed policies and to integrate local and Indigenous knowledge systems into global governance processes.

In conclusion, the Global Policy Dialogue discussions in Nairobi reinforced the importance of inclusive, accountable, and justice-centered environmental governance. The feedback highlighted the need for comprehensive reforms, innovative legal and policy mechanisms, and strengthened multilateral cooperation to address the triple planetary crisis. Rebuilding trust in multilateralism and empowering marginalized voices remain central to creating effective solutions that align with the Paris Climate Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the the Pact for the Future. A renewed commitment to equity, environmental stewardship, and inclusive governance is essential to tackle the complex challenges of the 21st century.

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For a related and recently released report by the Stimson Center, visit: [\*Global Governance Innovation Report 2025: Advancing the Pact for the Future and Environmental Governance\*](#). *About the Report:* With multilateral institutions facing an extreme liquidity crisis and the international rules-based order under threat, states and civil society partners committed to collective security, sustainable development, human rights, and multilateral diplomacy must step up to defend and champion a stronger, reformed, and more capable global governance system. An enormous financing gap and eroding political support for the Paris Agreement further threaten progress on tackling the world's most daunting challenge: climate change. Against a backdrop of divisive politics and mistrust among major powers, world leaders convened the Summit of the Future in September 2024 to renew existing international commitments and reimagine how aging international institutions can better cope with contemporary risks and opportunities. The *Global Governance Innovation Report 2025: Advancing the Pact for the Future and Environmental Governance (GGIR'25)* offers tools for assessing and boosting implementation of the summit's chief outcomes—the Pact for the Future and its Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations—and considers ways to understand and overcome bottlenecks to positive change on the road to the Pact's official high-level review in September 2028. It further analyzes and offers outside-the-box policy and institutional reform proposals for grappling with the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution—an urgent yet downplayed concern at the summit. GGIR'25 finds slow yet visible headway to date in realizing key goals of the Pact. Further success hinges on skillful multilateral diplomacy, sustained leadership across the UN system, active civil society engagement, and a robust, closely monitored follow-up effort to support the goals and commitments adopted at the summit.