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SPECIAL FEATURE

TOWARDS A GREEN FUTURE

IDSS-UIU hosts the International Conference on Sustainable Development (8th UIU-ICSD 2026)

CAMPUS DESK

From April 11 to 12, the Institute of Development Studies and Sustainability (IDSS) at United International University (UIU) hosted the 8th International Conference on Sustainable Development (UIU-ICSD 2026) at the UIU campus.

Centred around eight key themes—education for sustainable development; poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods; sustainable agriculture and food security; energy transition; sustainable cities; waste management and circular economy; water, coastal, and delta governance; and climate change and adaptation—the conference aimed to address the critical gap between knowledge generation and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation. Special emphasis was placed on water, coastal, and delta governance, aligning with the “Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100”.

UIU-ICSD 2026 received about 550 research papers from Canada, the UK, the Netherlands, India, Nepal, the Philippines, and Bangladesh. Around 365 research papers were selected for presentation. The conference provided an inclusive platform for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to strengthen the science-policy-practice interface through keynote sessions, panels, and interdisciplinary dialogue.

The inaugural ceremony of the conference was held on April 11. Neeltje Kielen, Delegated Representative, Water Affairs, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Bangladesh, was present as the chief guest in the inaugural ceremony. Dr Khairul Islam, Regional Director at WaterAid, South Asia Region, and Shreya Chakraborty, Country Focal Point, International Water Management Institute, Bangladesh, were present as guests of honour.

Prof. Dr Mashfiqus Salehin from the Institute of Water and Flood Management, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), was present as the inaugural speaker. Prof. Dr Hamidul Huq, Director of the Institute of Development Studies and Sustainability (IDSS) and Convener of the 8th UIU-ICSD 2026, opened the

inaugural session with a welcome and introductory address at the conference.

UIU Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr Md Abul Kashem Mia presided over the inaugural ceremony. During his speech, he said, “The scope of this conference is to create an enabling platform for scientists, academics, policy-makers, development practitioners, and other stakeholders from home and abroad to share innovations, ideas and knowledge, and critical concerns on sustainable development. I firmly believe that the continuity of this conference series through 2030 will play an important role in tracking progress, improving partnerships, and enhancing accountability in the implementation of the SDGs.”

Kielen said that everyone needs to work together to address global climate change and achieve the SDGs, noting that the conference will play an important role in advancing the SDGs.

UIU faculty members, officials, students, national and international sustainable development researchers, representatives from different universities and research organisations, national and international NGOs, and other distinguished guests were present at the inaugural ceremony. Following the opening ceremony and the plenary session, day one saw multiple parallel sessions. In these sessions, researchers presented papers aligned with the conference’s eight themes.

On day two of the conference, parallel sessions ran from 9 AM to 2 PM. Following lunch, the closing ceremony began at 3:30 PM. Prior to that, *Campus* caught up with some of the organisers and participants of the conference to have a candid discussion on the conference and sustainable development itself.

For Salma Begum, a lecturer and research fellow at the IDSS, the conference was as much about process as it was about outcome. “We divided our tasks within the team, and I have been learning and growing throughout the process,” she says. “These past four months have been a valuable learning journey for me. The teachers, students, participants, and volunteers all worked very hard to

organise this conference. It’s great to see such a collaborative environment.”

Justin Fanoy, an MSc student from the Netherlands conducting research in the coastal areas around Khulna, participated in the conference to give something back and share the knowledge he had gained during his thesis data collection with other students and professionals in the field of sustainable development.

Jafar Ullah Khan, a student of environment and development studies at UIU, saw the conference as an opportunity to be more connected. Sumit Kumar Sen, from Khulna University, talked fondly about the conference, mentioning the large number of participants, the engaging sessions, excellent management, and a presentation on research conducted in Teknaf.

Justin further noted the high academic standard and the productive blend of student and professional research in the conference—a combination that allows theory and practice to coexist. Jafar emphasised the role of interaction, of conversations with faculty members and students from different institutions.

Sumaiya Chowdhury from Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) highlighted the quality of organisation and the insightfulness of the sessions. She found the organisation and management excellent and enjoyed being at the conference,



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mentioning how the people she interacted with helped her learn a lot.

When asked how important it is for countries like Bangladesh to host such conferences related to sustainable development, Justin suggested that these discussions must not remain confined to academia; they must be implemented. Jafar framed it as a challenge, stating that it is a responsibility for young people in Bangladesh to engage more deeply with sustainable development and knowledge sharing.

During the closing ceremony, the special guests of the conference took to the stage to share their thoughts on the conference and sustainable development in general.

Alok Kumar Majumder, Director of Programme and Operations at RedOrange, applauded the significant volume of

research presented at the 8th UIU-ICSD 2026. Dr Muhammad Ariful Islam, President of the Bangladesh Institute of Planners, reminded the attendees that planning is about making choices, and for those choices to matter, they must be practical.

Dr Farhana Ahmed, Director and Principal Specialist, Research Development and Training Division, Center for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS), acknowledged the high academic standard of the presentations and pointed out that the real challenge was implementation. Juliate Keya Malakar, Executive Director of the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB), said that the challenge is no longer data collection but action, highlighting the fact that understanding affected populations is key, and without that, knowledge remains abstract.

The conference chair, Dr M Rezwana Khan, Professor and Director, Institute for Advanced Research, UIU, expressed his great pleasure in seeing the presented papers address a fundamental question he once asked by an economist: whether development, by its very nature, is sustainable at all. By revisiting this core debate, he noted that the conference is tackling the most essential challenges of our time.

Lastly, during the vote of thanks, Prof. Dr Hamidul Huq framed the event as a collective initiative—one that generated new ideas while identifying emerging challenges. His announcement of the next conference, scheduled for February 2027, suggested that this is not a one-off event but part of an ongoing conversation.

UIU-ICSD 2026 successfully united researchers, policymakers, and practitioners around critical sustainability challenges. Moving forward, participants must transform these insights into tangible action—breaking institutional barriers, implementing evidence-based solutions, and developing meaningful collaboration.



PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Dr Hamidul Huq on sustainable development and eight years of ICSD



CAMPUS DESK

United International University (UIU) is marking a significant milestone with the 8th International Conference on Sustainable Development (ICSD). Behind this achievement lies a vision to transform how universities approach education and research.

Campus sat down with Prof. Dr Hamidul Huq, Director of the Institute of Development Studies and Sustainability (IDSS), UIU, and conference convener, to talk about sustainable development and how UIU is putting it into practice through research, education, and this ambitious academic conference.

Prof. Huq traces the ICSD initiative’s roots to the UN’s pivotal 1987 report, *Our Common Future*, saying, “The report argued for the redefinition of development into ‘sustainable development’, an approach that is friendly to both the natural and social environment while also boosting economic development.”

The 2015 UN resolution on sustainable development created new educational imperatives, prompting UIU to integrate sustainability principles into its curriculum and assess their effectiveness through this conference.

The IDSS at UIU operates on a philosophy of knowledge-driven action. “The purpose of IDSS is to initiate empirical research and bring it into the classroom,” Prof. Huq states. “If initiatives are based on empirical knowledge, they lead to responsible consumption. IDSS’s mission is to make society responsible and knowledge-based.”

The conference thrives on cross-sector collaboration, drawing participants from universities, NGOs, and consultancy organisations across South Asia and beyond. International experts bring comparative perspectives, while local policymakers, parliament members, ministers, and engineers from water development boards engage with research findings.

“Foreign experts who may not have much knowledge about Bangladesh, but may have seen similar problems elsewhere, come to

our conference to learn and think critically about our challenges,” says Prof. Huq.

This global-local exchange enriches discussions and strengthens solutions. The collaboration extends to students, who participate in research projects and fieldwork each semester. Faculty members from various universities contribute as session chairs and presenters, while graduate students deliver their own research findings.

Perhaps most significantly, the ICSD bridges academia and policy. A dedicated plenary session examines Bangladesh’s ambitious “Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100”, the country’s century-long sustainable development roadmap. “We present critical analyses of both long-term and short-term plans, raise questions, and offer specific recommendations and suggestions,” Prof. Huq explains. “In subsequent forums with the government, they sometimes adopt our recommendations, which translates into fruitful action.”

Prof. Huq highlights an extraordinary response that has set the 8th ICSD apart. The conference witnessed four to five times higher abstract submissions compared to previous years. “The level of interest has been remarkable,” he noted. “People are not only eager to participate, but they genuinely want to be part of sustainable development efforts.”

This overwhelming response is also reflected in the enormous participation and widespread appreciation the conference has received. Researchers, students, policymakers, and development professionals have shown a strong desire to engage, collaborate, and share knowledge, signalling a growing collective commitment to sustainability. This year’s edition received around 600 paper submissions, further demonstrating the scale, credibility, and growing global recognition of the conference.

The 8th UIU-ICSD has thus evolved into more than just a conference; it has become a vibrant platform for those who aspire to make a real impact on society.



UIU-ICSD 2026 at a glance

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