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Summary of the 2025 Earthna Summit: 22-23 April 2025

“We aren’t reinventing the wheel here, but rather returning to what works.” These words by Eng. Ali Al Kuwari, CEO, Msheireb Properties, perfectly described the main objective of the 2025 edition of the [Earthna Summit](#). Over two packed days of panel discussions, roundtables, side events, expert talks, and multiple networking opportunities, speakers underlined the potential of combining “high-tech with no-tech” for achieving climate and sustainability objectives and improving the livability of cities in hot and arid regions.

The Arabic word Earthna – انشرا – captures the essence of sustainability, a prosperous future for humankind, and harmony with the planet. The Earthna Summits aim to act as a catalyst in the efforts of countries such as Qatar to drive tangible action on climate change and sustainability. With its focus on introducing sustainability into all facets of urban life and combining modern development approaches with traditional knowledge, the 2025 Earthna Summit facilitated engagement and collaboration among the region’s high-level dignitaries, technical experts, academics, government and non-governmental organizations, and leading international organizations.

In this respect, this second Earthna Summit did not disappoint. Across its full schedule, participants engaged on a myriad of topics centering on this edition’s theme: “Building Our Legacy: Sustainability, Innovation and Traditional Knowledge.” The exhibition space, which was also open to the public, extended this concept into living examples of traditional approaches that demonstrate their sustainability. In addition, the Earthna Village’s location in Barahat Msheireb, in the heart of the capital, reflects these practices. Representing an urban haven, designed to nurture living, leisure, and business in perfect harmony, all buildings carry either Gold or Platinum Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design or [LEED](#) certification. Alongside the 2025 Earthna Summit, an International Network for Traditional Building, Architecture and Urbanism or [INTBAU](#) track provided a platform to showcase traditional knowledge in architecture within urban settings.

Highlights of the Summit included the announcement of the inaugural four [Earthna Prize winners](#), during the opening plenary, for projects or actors integrating ancestral knowledge and cultural heritage in tackling modern environmental challenges.

The afternoon plenary of the second day featured the findings in the forthcoming report on the Arid Cities Network from the six pilot cities of Doha (Qatar), Jaipur (India), Seville (Spain), Lima (Peru), Marrakesh (Morocco), and Muscat (Oman).

High-level and expert panel sessions included:

- exploring sustainable solutions for resilience to water scarcity;
- opportunities, challenges, and the road ahead for the energy transition;
- harnessing artificial intelligence (AI) for smart governance;
- how to fund a sustainable future by reimagining climate finance;
- rethinking urban sustainability by adopting lessons learned from traditional architecture;

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Presentation of the Earthna Prize awards

- future-proofing cities to ensure they are smart, sustainable, and livable;
- harnessing partnerships to amplify traditional sustainable urban solutions; and
- how the tradition-technology nexus can address food insecurity.

The Summit convened on 22-23 April in Doha, Qatar, and was organized by the Qatar Foundation's Earthna Center for a Sustainable Future.

This report provides brief summaries of the main plenary sessions and panel discussions.

A Brief History of the Earthna Summit

The [Earthna Center for a Sustainable Future](#) (Earthna) was established by the Qatar Foundation to promote and enable a coordinated approach to environmental, social, and economic sustainability, thereby leading to future prosperity. During the first Earthna Summit, in 2023, participants, comprising global, regional, and local policymakers, among others, focused on the challenges facing hot and arid environments. The aim was to dispel the perception that these environments are less relevant to sustainability, since most global discussions tend to concentrate on issues more pertinent to tropical and temperate countries. The Summit showcased Indigenous, sustainable practices that span cultural, environmental, and social sustainability.

In April 2024, Earthna established the Earthna Prize initiative to identify and celebrate projects from across the globe that showcase how traditional knowledge and cultural heritage can be integrated into solutions to the most pressing environmental challenges. Leading up to the 2025 Summit, 12 finalists were chosen from over 400 submissions from more than 100 countries

in which applicants focused on one of four key areas: water resource management, food security, sustainable urbanism, and land stewardship. Each finalist will receive a portion of a USD 1 million prize pool to continue their initiatives and increase their impact.

Report of the Summit

Opening Plenary and Earthna Prize Ceremony

“Good ideas at the community level are like small tree seedlings planted into a bonsai container where they thrive, but remain limited in growth!” With these words, keynote speaker Muhammad Yunus, Chief Advisor to the Government of Bangladesh, highlighted the potential of all humans, which is often stifled by inflexible systems or lack of financial investment.

Opening remarks were provided by Her Excellency Sheikha Hind bint Hamad Al Thani, Vice Chairperson and CEO, Qatar Foundation, and Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Subaie, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change for Qatar. Sami Zeidan, Al Jazeera English, acted as master of ceremonies.

Describing the impact of finding inspiration from role models as a teenager, Idris Elba, UN Goodwill Ambassador, International Fund for Agricultural Development, said the primary reason for his active involvement in sustainability initiatives is to inspire other young people “at every opportunity.” Elba advocated for the use of social media platforms, highlighting the example of young Africans sharing sound agricultural practices via TikTok. He emphasized the importance of “breaking the mold” of the bonsai container, and noting that in order for “each one” to “teach one” you have to reach one.



Ann-Perry Witmer, University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana

Zeidan then proceeded to announce the four winners of the inaugural Earthna Prize:

- [Farmer Tantoh Foundation](#), a water conservation initiative benefitting over 250,000 people in Cameroon;
- [Seeds of Change Initiative](#) by Blooming World International, a Kenyan initiative training youth and women on good agricultural practices through reviving indigenous vegetable cultivation;
- [Thriving Fisheries, Thriving Oceans](#) by Blue Ventures, a global initiative supporting coastal communities by rebuilding traditional fisheries in locally-managed marine areas; and
- [Fundación Sumaj Kawsay Colombia](#) by Wuasikamas Ëconeêrã, which integrates Indigenous knowledge in initiatives that reduce negative climate impacts on biodiversity in Indigenous Colombian communities.

Water Scarcity: Exploring Sustainable Solutions for Resilience

On Tuesday, this panel highlighted best practices and insights from arid regions featured in Earthna’s newly-launched report on [Traditional Knowledge in Water Resource Management](#). Experts engaged in a lively discussion on the rich body of Indigenous and traditional practices available to address the water crisis. Moderator and journalist Maryam Nemazee described water as one of the most critical issues of our time, being “at the heart of every sustainability challenge.” She remarked that people in arid regions have pioneered innovative water technologies which have remained highly relevant in building water resilience over the centuries. She said “the tricky part is how to access, apply, and scale this knowledge.”

Dr. Ann-Perry Witmer, University of Illinois, welcomed the Earthna report, which contains case studies from Oman, the southwestern US, and Peru. “The technology that grows up in a place is the best technology for that place,” she underlined. She shared her experience working with communities in the Navajo Nation, paying tribute to their profound reverence for water, a stark contrast with the dominant approach of controlling nature.

Dr. Manzoor Qadir, Deputy Director, UN University Institute for Water, Environment and Health, lamented that events on

water technologies far outnumber events dedicated to traditional knowledge water solutions. He cautioned against leaving the critical importance of Indigenous knowledge systems and their context aside and instead focusing on “bigger solutions like desalination and water treatment.”

Dr. Rajendra Singh, Chairman, Tarun Bharat Sangh, described traditional knowledge as “the most modern system” but stressed that obstacles to implementing that system remain, often coming from governments that have different priorities.

Dr. Raha Hakimdavar, Georgetown University in Qatar, urged societies to revive the cultural respect for water seen in arid regions. “It’s not that we need more technology,” she said, noting that the real challenge is “to appreciate and understand water.”

Speakers concurred that the key enabling factors to incorporate Indigenous practices and knowledge into modern water management strategies include: recognizing the significance of this knowledge; listening attentively at the local level to understand the challenge; community ownership of the management system; and ensuring traditional knowledge holders can maintain ownership of their knowledge. They further highlighted that by integrating traditional and modern approaches, knock-on benefits can be generated for climate adaptation and mitigation efforts in arid regions.

Energy Transition: Opportunities, Challenges, and the Road Ahead

On Tuesday, Araceli Fernandez Pales, Head of the Technology Innovation Unit, International Energy Agency, opened the session. Outlining key trends in green energy development and deployment, she highlighted progress in deployment since 2015, pointing to government policies and market opportunities driving growth. Araceli Fernandez Pales emphasized that targeted and effective policies are key in facilitating a rapid energy transition, alongside the need to build supply chain resilience for mitigating energy security risks.

Moderated by Dr. Dhabia Al-Mohannadi from Hamad Bin Khalifa University, the ensuing panel addressed the role of alternative energies, interlinkages with economic development,



Araceli Fernandez Pales, International Energy Agency



Gauri Singh, Deputy Director-General, IRENA

and the implications of geopolitical trends on technology development and uptake.

Gauri Singh, Deputy Director-General, International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), emphasized that energy security and dependence are a high-priority on domestic policy agendas. Underlining that achieving net zero requires carbon removal alongside emission reduction, Singh noted that the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has the potential to be an innovator in developing key technologies such as carbon capture and storage.

Focusing on green hydrogen, Dr. Marcello Contestabile, Chief Economist, Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute (QEERI), emphasized its role in decarbonizing the long-distance freight sector and diversifying the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries' energy mix. He pointed to the region's competitive advantage for producing "clean" hydrogen through renewable energy systems and existing "grey" hydrogen uses, and further highlighted possible pathways for scaling up hydrogen production in the region.

Addressing the global growth in demand for renewable energies, Dr. Steven Wright, Associate Dean, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, stressed that demand is increasing across energy types. However, he noted that conventional energy sources will continue to play a role, saying it is an "energy addition, rather than a transition." He further underlined that energy consumption patterns are geography- and context-dependent, highlighting that priorities can vary from economic development and finding cost-effective solutions in the Global South, to renewable energy fuel development in the Global North.

Araceli Fernandez Pales addressed the importance of market-led renewable energy deployment, citing the ease of mass production of solar photovoltaic modules as an example. She highlighted the need to strengthen international collaboration and partnerships to build resilience in supply chains and reduce energy insecurity.

Dr. Omran Hamad Al-Kuwari, CEO, Qatar Foundation International, outlined the complex array of factors shaping the energy transition across countries and private actors, including the availability of existing technologies for decarbonization,

economic considerations, and socio-political pressures. For the MENA region, he noted progress in methane reduction amongst emission reduction strategies. Dr. Al-Kuwari further pointed to the non-linear evolution of decarbonization strategies, highlighting a return to using liquefied natural gas as a transition fuel in displacing the coal sector. On the potential of nuclear energy for reducing energy demand, he stressed that while nuclear is part of the solution, determining whether small modular reactors are fit-for-purpose remains to be seen.

Reimagining Climate Finance: Funding a Sustainable Future

Referencing a bleak outlook that combines declining overseas development aid commitments, weakening political and corporate commitment, and geopolitical headwinds from the US, speakers offered a range of innovative ideas to inspire optimism, in this session on Tuesday.

Moderator Justin Mundy, Chair, Earthna, set the scene by underlining that all the climate indicators are much worse than what science and climate models had forecast for this point in time a decade ago.

Prof. Lee Howell, Executive Director, Villars Institute, pointed out that the businesses that thrive in the current environment are those with a systems thinking mindset. He said that, as some investors are signaling that US Treasuries no longer provide the safe haven asset they seek, people are looking for new places to invest. He stressed that this indicates an opportunity for climate finance as an asset that potentially offers returns, planetary benefits, and license to operate.

Maja Groff, Convenor, Climate Governance Commission, said that while companies tend to focus on short-term supply chain risks, the real value for investors is in the longer-term sustainability space. She gave examples of recent studies and forecasts that underscore the attractiveness of investing in the sustainability transition, including the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research forecast of 2024, whereby the current trajectory will lead to 19% damage to global GDP by 2050. She cited insurance giant Allianz's warning that serious consequences will ensue for investments as more risks become uninsurable.



Maja Groff, Convenor, Climate Governance Commission



Prof. Lee Howell, Executive Director, Villars Institute

Ovais Sarmad, Vice-Chair, Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol Steering Committee, emphasized that the funds are available, as long as bureaucratic processes can be simplified and streamlined. Referencing the existence of such funds via the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environment Facility, and the new Fund for responding to Loss and Damage, he highlighted the potential to mobilize between USD 2 and 4 million annually.

Prof. Howell voiced optimism about the value that can be created by fostering synergies between big corporations and small- and medium-sized businesses that are closer to the local context. He suggested that big corporations working through their value chains can provide support to smaller entrepreneurs to finance climate adaptation solutions that can scale through network effects.

Groff advocated for a comprehensive road map for the international community that brings together multilateral and national development banks. She mentioned reciprocity whereby the latter, in aggregate, have more funds available to invest, and can have their capacity needs provided by the former.

Saying that a new narrative that aligns with a new political economy could also be effective, Howell urged participants to consider framing certain climate challenges as agriculture and food sector related, since agrifood systems account for nearly 30% of global emissions.

Rethinking Urban Sustainability: Lessons from Traditional Architecture

This session convened on Tuesday. Outlining the concept of “tipping points,” whereby major ecosystems will collapse beyond certain levels of global warming, Prof. Dr. Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Director General, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, emphasized the urgency for ensuring that the planet’s predicted temperature overshoot is “as short as possible.” With the built environment being the “biggest sinner” for carbon emissions, Prof. Dr. Schellnhuber stressed the transformative potential for “converting it into a saint” by using climate neutral or positive materials. He highlighted that through smart innovation, which combines high-tech with no-tech, cities could store up to half of global carbon dioxide output annually.

In ensuing discussions, moderator Kristina Murrin, CEO, The King’s Foundation, invited panelists to showcase how this thinking is put into practice.

Thomas Granier, Co-Founder, Nubian Vault Association, highlighted his project’s initiative, noting it leans on traditional architectural techniques from Egypt and Sudan to reduce the overall use of building materials in resource-scarce areas and provide an alternative to corrugate iron roofing and concrete walls. He emphasized the role of domestic markets in proving the suitability of such alternative practices.

Architect Youness Ouazri, CEO and Founder, Eco-dôme Maroc, outlined similarities with his organization’s work in Morocco that revives traditional architectural patrimony whilst incorporating modern science and engineering. He underlined that this ensures construction is both adapted to the local environment’s needs, such as resilience to seismic shocks, and also respects building regulations and norms. Architect Ouazri noted persistent challenges in scaling the uptake of traditional practices in architectural design and infrastructure development.

Addressing the interlinkages between the built and natural environment, His Excellency Fahad Al-Attiyah, Founder and CEO, Caravane Earth, lamented the “abandoning” of natural construction materials and the transition from a local to a transnational material value chain, which has persisted since the early 20th century. He further cited the built environment’s negative impacts on both the natural environment and quality of life through “disproportional” horizontal and vertical expansion.

Responding to audience questions on obstacles to a climate-positive built environment, Prof. Dr. Schellnhuber emphasized the importance of reviewing and removing obsolete planning regulations, including to reframe policy priorities from current energy efficiency frameworks for buildings, to a focus on building materials’ emissions across their full lifecycles.

Regarding approaches for systematically integrating traditional architectural principles in urban planning and design, His Excellency Al-Attiyah drew attention to the need for education programmes across sectors. On accelerating the transition to local



His Excellency Fahad Al-Attiyah, Founder and CEO, Caravane Earth



Bram Govaerts, Director-General, CIMMYT

value chains, he supported transforming the industrial economy into a craft-based one, including by dephasing the use of climate-negative materials.

Tackling Food (In)Security: The Tradition-Technology Nexus

In a keynote address in this session on Tuesday, Bram Govaerts, Director General, International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), presented on trends in crop resilience and drivers of its disruption, including climate change, geopolitical conflicts, and trade barriers. Noting CIMMYT's collaboration with insurance companies, he underlined the associated risks for different regions in the case that multiple disruption events occur within the same year. Govaerts noted these potential drivers include, among others, flooding, disease, and drought, and suggested investing in appropriate genetic developments for crop species to respond to such disruptions. He challenged participants to "embrace the opportunities of cultivating climate-resilient crops."

Moderator Dr. Zeinab Bashir Elbakri, Senior Advisor, Savana International Consultancies, called for clearer guidelines for financial instruments to ensure food security, acquisition of new technologies that enhance resilience, appropriate governance frameworks, and addressing inequalities to ensure healthy food is available and affordable for all.

Addressing how effective governance frameworks are key to ensuring food security, Prof. Luis Franceschi, Assistant Secretary General, the Commonwealth, stressed the nexus between good governance and political will. He demonstrated, through a video created with AI, how advisory avatars can give data-driven solutions to agriculture and finance ministers, alongside legal guidance based on the entirety of a country's jurisprudence and regulatory frameworks.

Carlos Loret de Mola, CEO, LifeSystems, emphasized the importance of systems-based approaches and delving into the traditional farming practices of past centuries to unpack how current generations can address food insecurity. He opined that humans should investigate why some of the oldest cultures abandoned their advanced food production practices and

disappeared from the earth. Using the example of the potato industry, which led to the development of over 4,000 cultivars over the centuries, and how these practices were recently replicated in the maize industry, Loret de Mola underscored that information about food's history is as important as future technological advancements.

Tackling the issue of innovative financial solutions, Dr. Dalal Aassouli, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, stressed the need for more inclusive finance and a greater focus on local solutions to build resilience to food supply chain disruptions. She further emphasized the promotion of financial instrument standardization across different regions and offering the right incentives for sustainable finance, such as allocating certain portfolios towards agricultural sectors.

Dr. Tareq Ali Al-Ansari, Acting Executive Director, QEERI, and Hamad Bin Khalifa University, expanded on how to harness energy innovation in arid environments like Qatar, where food security is a complex issue, with interdependencies among food, water, and energy security. As examples, he described agricultural innovations such as: greenhouses floating on deep sea water, noting these benefit from cooler water temperatures and thus save on cooling and water use; and utilizing waste and carbon dioxide to generate energy and reduce water use by 30-40%.

Future-proofing Our Cities: Smart, Sustainable, and Livable

Also on Tuesday, Karim Elgendy, Executive Director, Caroun Institute, underlined that cities and urban areas are not immune to the increasing environmental risks arising from climate change, highlighting specific challenges faced by the region's cities in arid, resource-scarce, or coastal environments. He emphasized that the climate crisis should catalyze a review of how cities are designed and built, calling for applying lessons from traditional architecture, which "responds to the needs of the local environment." Elgendy cautioned against "innovation for innovation's sake," noting that technological development has a



Dr. Tareq Ali Al-Ansari, Acting Executive Director, QEERI

fundamental role in meeting global climate objectives, including reducing emissions and energy use.

Moderated by Abdulrahman Hamad Al-Mana, Senior Urban Planner and Spatial Planning Unit Head, Ministry of Municipality, Qatar, panelists explored approaches that aim to increase the livability of cities and build climate resilient urban environments.

Nadine Bitar Chahine, Co-Founder and Managing Partner, Baladiya Catalyst, stressed the importance of place in enabling city-dwellers to meet and strengthen a sense of belonging and cultural identity. She said that the idea of a “grid” is Eurocentric, pointing to the prevailing Arabic concept of networks for city planning. Chahine further called for initiating a dialogue on values, highlighting the need for revitalizing societies that value sustainability and cultural identity rather than consumption and technology.

Eng. Fatima Mohamed Fawzy, Msheireb Properties, highlighted environmental and livability considerations that were incorporated in designing Doha’s Msheireb district, such as ensuring cities are walkable. Fawzy underscored that principles of sustainability should not be limited to the economy and environment, and noted co-benefits for improving quality of life, health, and social cohesion.

Prof. Amida Sholan, Sana’a University, highlighted the connection between nature, history, and cultural heritage that makes cities unique, emphasizing these are an important element of the world’s diversity. She pointed to technologies and designs found in ancient Yemeni cities that are applicable to modern ones, saying that traditional urban planning methods share the foundations of modern sustainability design.

In ensuing discussions, panelists highlighted the potential of replicating historic city center designs, noting these were already devised to be livable and adapted to local environmental specificities. They called for urban planning that consolidates cultural identity and pointed to the role of technologies such as AI and cooling to tackle the severe heat crisis in the region’s cities through smart planning.



Prof. Amida Sholan, Professor, Sana’a University



Marco Lambertini, Convener, Nature Positive Initiative

Towards a Nature Positive Planet: Challenges and Opportunities

During Tuesday’s closing plenary, speakers emphasized the costs of inaction on biodiversity loss and the degradation of nature. They outlined strategies and solutions such as engaging people “through art that fires their imaginations,” and clear communication of science that explains what is at stake.

Moderated by Nick Clark, Environment Editor and Anchor, Al Jazeera English, the session opened with Thijs Biersteker, Artist and Founder, Woven Foundation, presenting examples of communicating science through art to engage people more deeply. He recalled that much of the nature and climate crises are impossible for humans to visualize, such as a million trees being cut down. “We need to start ‘feeling’ the facts,” he said, emphasizing that “facts don’t move people, emotions do.”

Marco Lambertini, Convenor, Nature Positive Initiative, noted that the great progress of the 20th century in terms of economic growth and poverty reduction came at the expense of nature. He added that nature is only assigned a value when it is dead, such as a tree that is felled for timber, or a fish harvested for human consumption. “A total of USD 3 trillion is spent every year in subsidizing activities that are harmful to nature, as if nature were our worst enemy,” he added.

Jane Madgwick, international conservationist and author, emphasized that nature is a powerful technology that pulls carbon from the air and absorbs it in the Ocean. She cautioned against continuing harmful practices such as draining wetlands, noting this can unleash large quantities of carbon into the atmosphere.

Dr. Grethel Aguilar, Director General, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), insisted that Nature Positive is not just about the environment, underlining that it is a social and economic imperative as well. She deplored the slow pace of progress on adopting solutions, and highlighted the importance of communicating in clear and simple language.

Dr. Radhouane Ben-Hamadou, Director, Research and Policy Development, Earthna, noted that Qatar has unique local ecosystems that have adapted to their location adjacent to the hottest sea in the world. In this context, he said researchers are working to understand how adaptation has evolved over

thousands of years, thus offering valuable lessons for many countries which will face similar environmental stresses in the decades to come.

Acknowledging that achieving Nature Positive by 2030 will require a massive transformation that demands creativity, Madgwick emphasized that “you can’t restore nature like a painting – it’s not static, it’s continually evolving. We need to imagine new landscapes, new cities of the future.”

Women Leading Collaboration: Partnerships for Sustainable Development

On Wednesday, Her Excellency Ambassador Patricia Espinosa Cantellano, CEO, onepoint5, and former Executive Director, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), opened the panel on women’s leadership for partnerships on sustainable development by describing women and girls as catalysts of transformation. To maximize that potential, she said more work is needed to provide access to finance, alongside education and capacity building. Summing up the winning formula as the three I’s - invest, innovate, impact – she pointed out that giving women and girls access to finance, land rights, and digital tools can be the difference between stagnation and transformation.

Moderator Shaikha Al-Marri, Deputy Director, GCC Programme, International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies, interviewed Her Excellency Dr. Hamda Al-Sulaiti, Deputy Speaker, Shura Council, Qatar, who underscored the importance of lifelong learning, both informal and formal, as a key tool in driving progress for women’s career trajectories. “No matter how far you continue in education, as long as I’m alive, I’m a learner and I have to keep developing myself,” she said, adding that the learning process is a continuous one, not limited to age, capacity, position, or gender.

Sheikha Amna Al Thani, CEO, Strategy Hub, a Qatari-based consultancy firm focusing on sustainability and economic transition, outlined several gaps that need to be closed to tap the full potential of strategic partnerships that deliver long-term impact. Among those gaps, she highlighted the lack of inclusivity in nurturing these partnerships, notably the participation of

women and of small- and medium-sized enterprises. She lamented the absence of a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the impact of such partnerships.

She called for a direct link with national strategies to better develop partnerships in fields such as AI and clean energy. She also noted that Qatar has a clear strategy for reducing emissions, allowing the government to leverage the private sector to develop solutions, and bring in start-ups, incubators, and universities.

Sheikha Haya Al-Thani, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Qatar Fund for Development, recalled that Qatar has many partnerships that relate to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting those contributing to the achievement of SDG 3 on good health and wellbeing. Regarding the main success factors for building long-lasting partnerships, she singled out trust, flexibility of partners, and the ability to listen to each other with respect.

Mangroves: Protecting Ecosystems and Supporting Communities

On Wednesday, 23 April, participants attended the screening of a documentary highlighting the biodiversity of mangroves and the threats these ecosystems face. The film was produced by Earthna and Azzam Al Manai, wildlife and underwater photographer.

In an interview following the screening, Al Manai underlined that the role of his work and of photography more broadly is “inspiring, rather than impressing” audiences. He further remarked that a photographic approach allows different angles or perspectives to be taken, from a bird’s eye view of the ecosystem to a close up shot that demystifies the secret life of animals and plants.

The session’s discussions were moderated by Dr. Mona Al-Kuwari, Earthna, and featured panelists Yousef Al Hamar, Director, Wildlife Development Department, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Qatar, and Nouf Al Wasmī, Director of Reserves Directorate, Supreme Council for Environment, Bahrain.

Regarding key actions required to preserve biodiversity, Al Wasmī stressed the need for implementing regulations and



Sheikha Amna Al Thani, Founder and CEO, Strategy Hub



Nouf Al Wasmī, Director of Reserves Directorate, Supreme Council for Environment, Bahrain

legislation that penalize those who harm biodiversity. With Al Hamar, she added that the natural habitats of mangroves should be demarcated as protected areas.

Al Wasmi also pointed to the importance of early-age education programmes to ensure citizens “shoulder the collective responsibility” of protecting mangroves. Al Hamar concurred that awareness raising and facilitating on-site visits for students are critical to foster links between people and nature and to transform negative perceptions. Al Wasmi highlighted the potential of eco-tourism initiatives, saying that these can attract investment in ecosystem restoration and local infrastructure.

Responding to audience questions, Al Hamar outlined the challenges in *ex situ* mangrove conservation and planting programmes, and Al Wasmi emphasized the spillover benefits arising from these ecosystems, including mitigating coastal erosion, sequestering carbon, and beautification.

New Sustainability Frameworks: Beyond GDP

In a keynote address on Wednesday, Earthna Executive Director Dr. Gonzalo Castro de la Mata explained why traditional economic and biocapacity models are not suitable for measuring the sustainability and development trajectories of countries. He outlined a new innovative framework that goes beyond GDP to measure “inclusive wealth,” which is in the early stages of adoption in Qatar. Castro de la Mata underscored that this framework captures a wider array of relevant metrics of development, as well as their interconnectivity. He noted these include human and natural capital.

Moderated by Hana Elshehaby, Middle East Council on Global Affairs, panelists addressed the implementation requirements for the [inclusive wealth framework](#) (IWF). Mohamed Al Sharif, Director, Partnerships, Strategy, and Business Development, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, stressed the importance of putting humans at the center of sustainable development frameworks. He shared lessons learned from past frameworks such as the Human Development Index, including the importance of simplifying the concept and objectives of human capital, and increasing credibility, to facilitate understanding by policymakers and civil society. Al Sharif further noted the role of regional collaboration and partnerships, including through the Arab Fund, for meeting sustainable development objectives and implementing the IWF in Qatar and beyond.

Prof. Lee Howell, Executive Director, Villars Institute, underscored that these innovative development policies must include intergenerational perspectives and needs, as “youth having confidence in the future drives investment.” He added that the IWF encompasses a range of resource and capital types, therefore enabling countries to “play to their strengths” on their development pathways. Howell stressed that coordination, and reducing associated costs, is key in implementation, alongside acknowledging that shifting away from GDP models of development requires transforming behaviors and mindsets. He underscored that while the IWF is robust and anticipatory, policymakers must ensure its “usability.”

Dr. Zeinab Bashir Elbakri, Senior Advisor, Savana International Consultancies, said strong political commitment

at the highest level is key to successfully implementing new frameworks, along with: mainstreaming the paradigms of such frameworks across sectors; systematic capacity building, particularly for data collection; and investment in strategic international collaboration. She emphasized the need to focus on human capital, and issues of economic security and inequality.

Regarding data collection and monitoring needs, panelists converged on the importance of building human and infrastructural capacity for gathering, managing, and analyzing the data needed for the diverse facets of development and capital captured by the IWF. In closing, panelists cited the key challenges to applying the IWF as strengthening buy-in from youth, engaging civil society, securing high-level political commitment, and establishing metrics for monitoring.

Nature and Faith-Based Values

On Wednesday, in a thought-provoking session, which explored the relationship between humans and nature through the lens of spirituality, speakers laid out a fresh and inspiring vision of sustainability that is conceptually grounded in both classical and contemporary cross-faith teachings.

Dr. Recep Şentürk, Dean, College of Islamic Studies, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, described the current environmental crisis as an ethical and spiritual one, in which humans are out of sync with the meaning of nature due to unchecked materialism and globalization. He outlined a framework of environmental ethics grounded in altruism and sustainability. In order to get onto a sustainable path, he emphasized that humans need to “reshuffle the current paradigm” in which ethics and politics come under the hegemony of economics, and “transform our relationship with nature to one of care.”

Dr. Guillaume de Vaulx, Head of Agriculture, Heenat Salma Farm, highlighted that the Quran contains verses that attest that the mountains, rocks, stars, and trees all glorify the existence of Allah. He noted that although there are different ways to interpret religious teachings to enhance our approaches to nature, the fact that contemporary terms for describing environmental issues, such as the biodiversity crisis, do not exist in the Quran is a challenge for aligning teachings.



Dr. Guillaume de Vaulx, Head of Agriculture, Heenat Salma Farm

Farhana Mayer, Laudato Si' Research Institute, University of Oxford, pointed to correlations between the SDGs and the Islamic Divine Names (Names of God), which enshrine ethical principles. Noting these serve as a moral compass for humans and relate to the inter-connectedness and the sanctity of all life, Mayer also highlighted correspondences between Quranic ecological teachings and Pope Francis' encyclicals, which contain critiques of consumerism and environmental degradation.

Prof. Odeh Al Jayyousi, Professor, Arabian Gulf University, emphasized the importance of protecting the dignity of humans, "as we are part and parcel of nature: if we violate nature, we violate ourselves." He further queried what is meant by sustainability, suggesting redefining quality of life: "the definition has nothing to do with hoarding or having materialistic things. It relates to being satisfied, not to having the best smartphone or car."

Plenary: The Case for an Arid Cities Network

On Wednesday, during the afternoon session, participants considered the establishment and potential role of an arid cities network, with all agreeing on a growing need for a global network and convening power, and that Qatar is well-positioned to be a global leader in this area.

Moderator Anthony Flint, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, highlighted that the idea behind a network among arid cities is to foster and share innovation in finding solutions to common challenges.

Prof. David Simon, Royal Holloway, University of London, presented findings from a pilot needs assessment carried out in six cities (Doha, Jaipur, Seville, Lima, Marrakesh, and Muscat) that identified several challenges. As priority themes from the assessment, he highlighted resource sustainability, and a sustainable built urban environment, with a specific focus on harvesting information about traditional and Indigenous knowledge systems. Simon described the cities' diverse governance arrangements with their multi-level complexities, including geographies and population sizes, and highlighted that new hybrid responses are emerging, including for cooling systems, energy saving solutions, and making urban areas more livable.

Rafael López Aliaga, Mayor of Lima, Peru, described the challenges facing his populous and highly arid city. Pointing to Lima's dry-season shortfall of approximately 41.6 billion gallons of water annually, he highlighted a water provision programme in which some 100,000 youth volunteers participate on weekends to provide water to the city's 1.5 million poorest residents.

Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary, UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), stressed that of the 3.2 billion people affected by land degradation and aridity, half of them live in cities. He suggested that an arid cities network can jointly tackle and share experiences on the challenges of sandstorms, wastewater purification and use, sea water



Terri Wills, Children's Investment Fund Foundation

desalination, city greening, and cooling during extreme heat periods.

Eng. Ali Al Kuwari, CEO, Msheireb Properties, described the advantages of leaning on traditional urbanism and architecture in responding to modern urbanization and environmental challenges in arid climates. He shared that, by engaging with urban designers and engineers, the Msheireb district was able to significantly and cost-effectively reduce urban heat levels and water usage.

Flint underlined that combining traditional techniques with modern concepts of sustainability is an intuitive, simple, and effective approach, with potential for replicability and scaling up to other urban areas.

Addressing the practicalities of establishing an arid cities network, Terri Wills, Climate Director, Children's Investment Fund Foundation, highlighted the importance of enshrining flexibility in networks for responding to cities' needs. Pointing to the success of existing networks of cities supporting one another in tackling social and environmental challenges, she underlined that municipal governments can often be more ambitious than their national counterparts and, consequently, networks can more effectively foster the spread of innovation. Wills noted that an arid city network has the potential to open



Rafael López Aliaga, Mayor of Lima, Peru

dialogues on common challenges and facilitate solution-finding through experience-sharing.

Responding to audience questions, Thiaw pointed out that solutions for arid cities must be accessible and replicable, and advocated for the importance of revisiting traditional practices and Indigenous knowledge for such solutions.

All the speakers indicated their strong support for an arid cities network, although they deliberated on whether it should be a standalone network, or a sub-set of an existing one such as C40 Cities. Eng. Al Kuwari further called for the network's name to go beyond "arid cities" to better encompass climate challenges.

The Earthna Summit panel sessions closed on Wednesday afternoon, with participants and the public continuing to engage in fireside talks and networking activities into the evening.

Upcoming Meetings

International Agrobiodiversity Congress: Addressing the theme "Agrobiodiversity for People and Planet," and hosted by the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences and Bioversity Alliance, the Congress will gather policymakers, scientists, producers, entrepreneurs, and farmers with a shared interest in the conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity around the world. **dates:** 20-22 May 2025 **location:** Kunming, China **www:** alliancebioiversityciat.org/events/3rd-international-agrobiodiversity-congress

69th meeting of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council: The GEF Council, which meets twice annually, develops, adopts, and evaluates the operational policies and programmes for GEF-financed activities. **dates:** 2-6 June 2025 **location:** Washington, DC, US **www:** thegef.org/events/69th-gef-council-meeting

Global Agrifood Biotechnologies Conference: Taking place as part of FAO's 80th Anniversary celebrations, and building on the FAO Science and Innovation Forum 2024, the conference aims to provide a neutral platform to examine how biotechnological tools can drive transformation to sustainable agrifood systems, ensuring equitable access, and delivering meaningful impacts at all levels. **dates:** 16-18 June 2025 **location:** FAO headquarters, Rome, Italy **www:** fao.org/events/detail/fao-biotech-conference-2025/en

62nd Sessions of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies: Deliberations during this meeting will feed into the Amazonia Climate Change Conference (COP 30) to be held in Belém, Brazil, in November. **dates:** 16-26 June 2025 **location:** Bonn, Germany **www:** unfccc.int/sb62

41st International Association for Hydro-environment Engineering and Research World Congress: IAHR will be held on the theme "Innovative Water Engineering for Sustainable Development" and will focus on the importance of innovative water engineering in meeting the SDGs and water resource targets. **dates:** 22-27 June 2025 **location:** Singapore **www:** 2025.iahr.org

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2025: HLPF 2025 will convene under the theme

"Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind."

dates: 14-23 July 2025 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** hlpf.un.org/2025

15th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: COP 15 will be held under the theme "Protecting Wetlands for our Common Future." **dates:** 23-31 July 2025 **location:** Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe **www:** ramsar.org/meetings

World Water Week 2025: The Week will focus on the theme "Water for Climate Action," which recognizes the pivotal role of water in global efforts to reduce GHG emissions and to build resilience safeguarding ecosystems and communities. **dates:** 24-28 August 2025 **location:** Stockholm, Sweden **www:** worldwaterweek.org

IUCN World Conservation Congress: Held once every four years, the World Conservation Congress brings together several thousand leaders and decision-makers representing government, civil society, Indigenous Peoples, business, and academia, with the goal of conserving the environment and harnessing the solutions nature offers to global challenges. **dates:** 9-15 October 2025 **location:** Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates **www:** iucncongress2025.org

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) SBSTTA 27: The 27th meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice will address matters of relevance to the implementation of the Convention and the Global Biodiversity Framework. **dates:** 20-24 October 2025 **location:** Panama City, Panama **www:** cbd.int/meetings

For additional upcoming events, see sdg.iisd.org

Glossary

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| CIMMYT | International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center |
| CBD | Convention on Biological Diversity |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN |
| GCC | Gulf Cooperation Council |
| GEF | Global Environment Facility |
| GHG | Greenhouse gas |
| HLPF | High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development |
| IUCN | International Union for Conservation of Nature |
| IWF | Inclusive wealth framework |
| MENA | Middle East and North Africa |
| QEERI | Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| UNFCCC | UN Framework Convention on Climate Change |