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Community-Based Research:

A Movement of Possibility



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MESSAGE

From the Director

Dear Colleagues and Esteemed Partners,

Since its founding at the Asian University for Women (AUW) in April 2021, the Center for Climate Change and Environmental Health (3CEH) has turned research into action—demonstrating that knowledge, when paired with community engagement, can become a powerful force for change. Through a transdisciplinary approach that unites local insights and global expertise, 3CEH confronts the urgent environmental and climate challenges facing low and middle-income countries in Asia, translating research into solutions that improve lives and strengthen resilience.

Situated in one of the world's most climate-vulnerable regions, Bangladesh, 3CEH works hand-in-hand with communities, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to create evidence-driven, locally relevant solutions. Projects such as Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar (K4DM) and Catalysing Transformative Change in Planetary Health Education (CATA-EARTH) show how community-centered research can empower voices often unheard, catalyze systemic change, and shape equitable, sustainable futures. Central to our mission is the empowerment of women researchers across Asia—recognizing their indispensable role in crafting resilient, low-carbon societies.

This newsletter celebrates community-based research as a movement of possibility: a demonstration that when communities and researchers come together, knowledge becomes action, ideas become impact, and challenges become opportunities. I invite you to engage with these stories, draw inspiration, and join us in advancing research as a tool for equity, sustainability, and transformative change.

With deep appreciation for your partnership and vision,

Dr. Sayed Mohammad Nazim Uddin

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THE K4DM FELLOWSHIP

The Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar (K4DM) Fellowship arrived at the Center for Climate Change and Environmental Health (3CEH), Asian University for Women (AUW) in 2022 carrying far more than academic opportunity. Supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the fellowship empowers Myanmar's ethnic minority youth with the education, skills, and opportunities to become future leaders and catalysts for positive change in their communities. It brought with it a quiet promise of possibility for young Myanmar ethnic minority women who had long believed that doors like these were never meant for them. For nine fellows who had spent their childhoods navigating displacement, makeshift classrooms, and the daily challenges of camp life, this fellowship became the first tangible bridge to a future they had once considered beyond reach.

The fellows came to AUW carrying stories shaped by years in crowded shelters—studying beneath plastic sheets that flapped in monsoon winds, waiting in long queues for water, and sharing single notebooks under the dim glow of lanterns. University halls, research labs, and international conferences had always felt like worlds far away. Yet through the IDRC Fellowship, AUW became that world: a space where they were not only welcomed but valued, where their lived experiences became powerful tools for inquiry, leadership, and change.

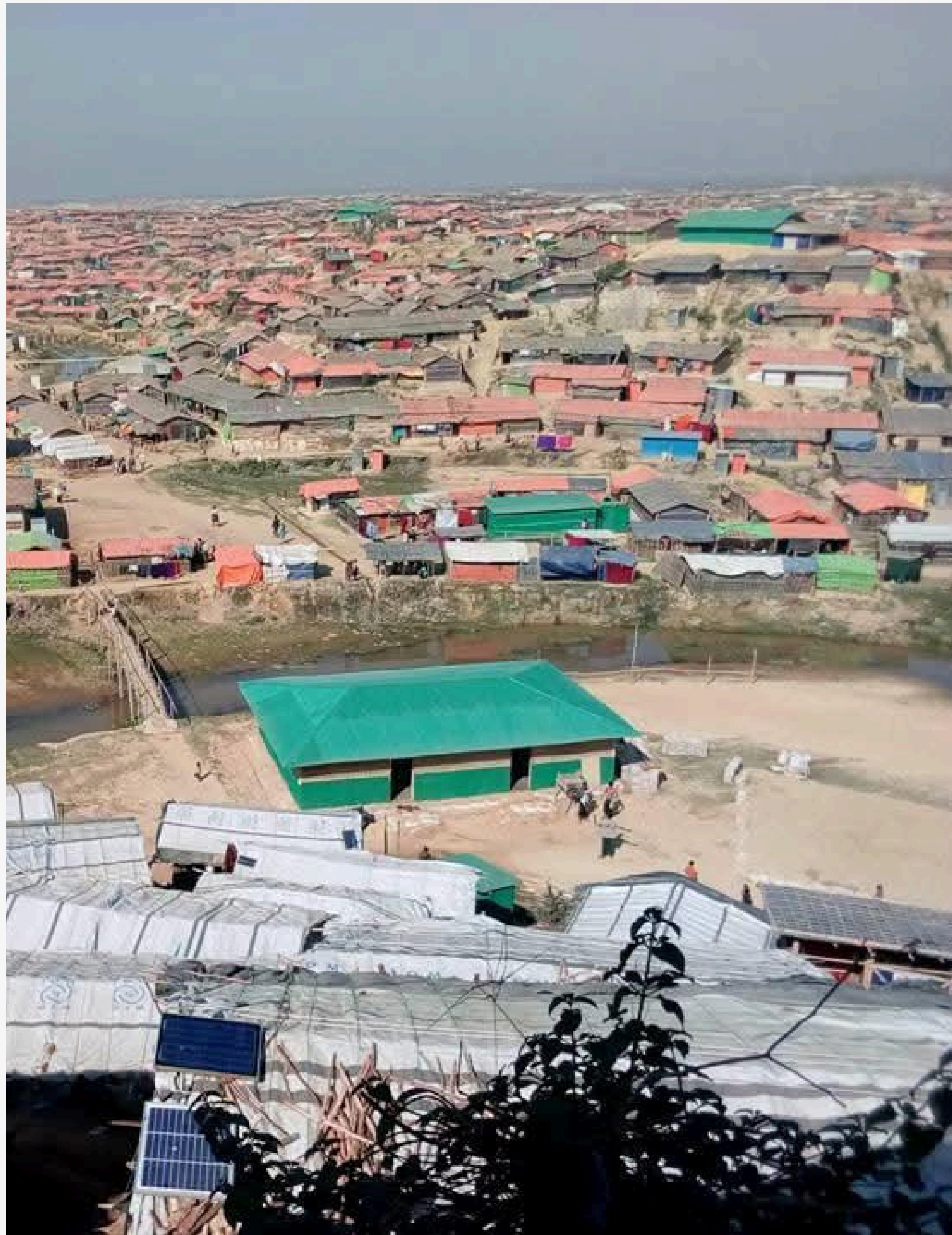
The fellowship's impact is already visible. A total of three young students from Myanmar's diverse ethnic minority backgrounds have graduated so far—one master's fellow in 2024 and two bachelor's fellows in the same year—with three more expected to graduate in 2025 and another three in 2026.



Each of these journeys represents not only academic success but the breaking of generational barriers. They became scholars whose firsthand insights enriched discussions on some of the world's most urgent research questions.

From the moment the fellowship began, transformation followed. Through structured training, mentorship, research assistantships, and exposure to real-world humanitarian challenges, the fellows learned how to translate their personal realities into evidence and analysis. Their work grew from classroom assignments into rigorous studies on WASH challenges, educational access, climate impacts, gendered vulnerabilities, and the everyday resilience embedded in camp life.

What once felt like silence turned into voice. They presented their findings at the Cox's Bazar Symposium, contributed to global dialogues at ICBMS4 in Chiang Mai, engaged with scholars and practitioners at the Asian Institute of Technology, and participated in a series of regional workshops that amplified their perspectives to audiences that had rarely heard insights directly from Rohingya researchers. They were no longer speaking as camp residents but as emerging experts, shaping conversations that influence humanitarian policy and practice.



The transformation extended far beyond academics. Confidence replaced hesitation. Purpose replaced uncertainty. A young woman who had once doubted her abilities now writes with clarity for international platforms, mentoring others who remind her of her younger self. Another, who lost her home to conflict, now uses research to envision a more inclusive future for Myanmar. Their insights are already informing humanitarian programs, guiding NGOs, strengthening monitoring and evaluation efforts, and helping policymakers understand displacement through a lens that is too often missing: the voices of those who live it.

The success of the IDRC Fellowship at AUW lies not only in conferences attended, reports written, or data collected. Its greatest achievement is what it quietly restored: belief. Belief that their voices matter. Belief that education can shift narratives. Belief that opportunity is possible even for those born into crisis.

Today, these nine women stand as powerful, quiet symbols of what happens when resources meet resilience. Their influence is rippling outward—shaping organizational decisions, inspiring younger girls in the camps who now see a path where none existed, and proving to global audiences that refugees are not defined by crisis but strengthened by it.

What began as a fellowship has grown into a movement of possibility. It is reshaping how communities understand displacement, how institutions invest in potential, and how the next generation of Rohingya girls imagine their futures. Far beyond AUW's campus, the fellowship's impact continues to unfold—reaching classrooms, camps, conference halls, and policy arenas across the region. And this is only the beginning.

RESEARCH: AS A LIFELINE



Research is more than knowledge—it is a lifeline, a tool for transformation, and a voice for the unheard. For nine Myanmar ethnic minority women fellows of the Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar (K4DM) Fellowship, supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) at the Asian University for Women (AUW), research has become a powerful tool to transform lived hardships into meaningful action that is shaping change globally. Their studies on WASH, education access, environmental challenges, and community well-being do more than document problems—they inform humanitarian programs, shape policy, and elevate communities often ignored.

Every survey, interview, and observation carries the weight of their experiences: years in overcrowded camps, interrupted schooling, and constant uncertainty. From these challenges, they generate insights that directly improve access to clean water, safe learning spaces, and resilient infrastructure. Their research has been showcased at the international Cox's Bazar Symposium, ICBMS4 in Chiang Mai, and the Winter School at the Asian Institute of Technology, turning knowledge from the camp into solutions that ripple far beyond its borders.

These fellows are not just researchers—they are mentors, advocates, and changemakers. By transforming their stories into evidence, they are shaping a world where displaced voices matter, policies reflect lived realities, and possibility becomes reality.

LIFE BEYOND THE CAMP: STORY OF CHANGE

She was born in the conflict worn hills of Northern Rakhine State and raised amid the crowded uncertainty of Cox's Bazar refugee camps, a place where every day tested hope and every night whispered fear. Yet from the edges of displacement, she imagined a life beyond survival.

Through the Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar (K4DM) Fellowship supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), that imagination became action. She completed her undergraduate studies in Environmental Sciences at the Asian University for Women (AUW), transforming her own journey into a beacon for others who like her had known only limitation.

At AUW, she did more than study. She became a leader who gave voice to the voiceless. As team leader for a humanitarian organization, she delivered critical support to displaced communities. As local coordinator for Students for Liberty, she championed the right to education and freedom of thought. At AUW's Center for Climate Change and Environmental Health (3CEH), she conducted research that wove scientific rigor with justice, turning observation into action. Through the Aspire Leaders Program, she brought global perspectives back to her home, bridging worlds that had once felt unreachable.

Her writings, published in *The Art Garden Rohingya* and *Forced Migration Review* 70, reveal the courage, resilience, and pain of Rohingya women, stories too often unseen. Her journey proves that even from the margins of displacement, life beyond the camp is not just possible, it is already unfolding. She is now pursuing a Master's degree while doing research, continuing to shape a better future for her community and beyond. She is a living testament to the power of change.

WHERE WATER WRITES THE FUTURE

In January 2025, the Center for Climate Change and Environmental Health (3CEH) research team visited Shyamnagar upazila, Satkhira district, a region along Bangladesh's southwest coast where the forces of nature and climate change are felt in every aspect of life. This mission, under the Catalysing Transformative Change in Planetary Health Education project (CATA-Earth) co-funded by the European Commission, aimed to explore the intertwined challenges of environmental change, human health, and community resilience in a landscape constantly reshaped by water.

In Satkhira, water is both a lifeline and a source of uncertainty. Rising tides, creeping salinity, and frequent cyclones quietly but relentlessly reshape the possibilities for local communities. Every drop of freshwater, every seasonal shift, affects farming choices, drinking water, sanitation, and family health. The flow of water tells a story of livelihoods at risk and generations learning to survive, adapt, and hope. It influences daily decisions, shapes dreams, and determines what the future may hold.

The mission's core objective was to carry out a baseline survey, capturing life on the frontlines of climate change. The team—Md. Akib Javed, Sadia Salim, Sal Sabila, Jimia Tabassum Suchi, Sadia Hamid Mim, Aurora Ahmed Psyche, Shahriar Hossen Sabbir, Keshab Sarkar, and Raihan Ul Hoque—worked across Gabura, Padmapukur, Pratappur, Golakhali Island, and Burigoalini, engaging residents to understand their struggles and resilience. Discussions on climate disasters, water security, sanitation, sustainable agriculture, and waste management highlighted both vulnerabilities and community strength. Stories of farmers battling salinity, women walking miles for safe water, and communities rebuilding after cyclones brought the research to life and emphasized the urgent need for sustainable solutions.

Beyond research, the initiative promotes planetary health education, building local capacity and empowering communities to act, adapt, and shape a sustainable future. This mission stands as a testament to human resilience, laying the foundation for strategies that protect lives, safeguard livelihoods, and ensure Satkhira's story is one of courage, adaptation, and hope.



TINY HANDS, BIG IMPACT

GLOBAL HANDWASHING
DAY 2025: CGS & 3CEH
OF AUW EMPOWER
YOUNG LEARNERS



On October 15, 2025, the Center for Climate Change and Environmental Health (3CEH) at AUW joined hands with Chittagong Grammar School (CGS) to celebrate Global Handwashing Day 2025, turning a simple habit into a powerful force for health, learning, and sustainable development. The CGS campus came alive with laughter, curiosity, and excitement as Class 2 and 3 students, many from underprivileged backgrounds, explored how proper handwashing can prevent disease, save lives, and strengthen communities.

The 3CEH team—Sadia Salim, Tahiya Tasnim, Arap Jahan Nodi, and Aysha Farid—designed



interactive demonstrations, storytelling, and quizzes that made learning fun, memorable, and hands-on. Students practiced hygiene step by step, built teamwork and confidence, and received take-home materials to carry healthy habits into their families and neighborhoods.

Guided by Dr. Sayed Mohammad Nazim Uddin, Director of 3CEH, and Mr. Tohsin Khan, Head of National Curriculum at CGS, the event promoted SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). Teachers witnessed immediate positive changes as children embraced hygiene practices with enthusiasm.

The celebration ended with songs, prizes, and bright smiles, leaving students inspired and empowered. This event demonstrated how knowledge, engagement, and collaboration can shape a healthier, safer, and more sustainable future for all.



HOW TO WASH YOUR HANDS USING SOAP AND WATER

1



Apply soap to your hands

2



Rub your hands palm to palm

3



Rub back to hands

4



Scrub between your fingers

5



Clean around each of your thumbs

6



Rub your fingertips into your palm

7



Rub your wrists. Repeat for both hands

8



Rinse your hands with water

9



Use a towel or tissue to completely dry your hands



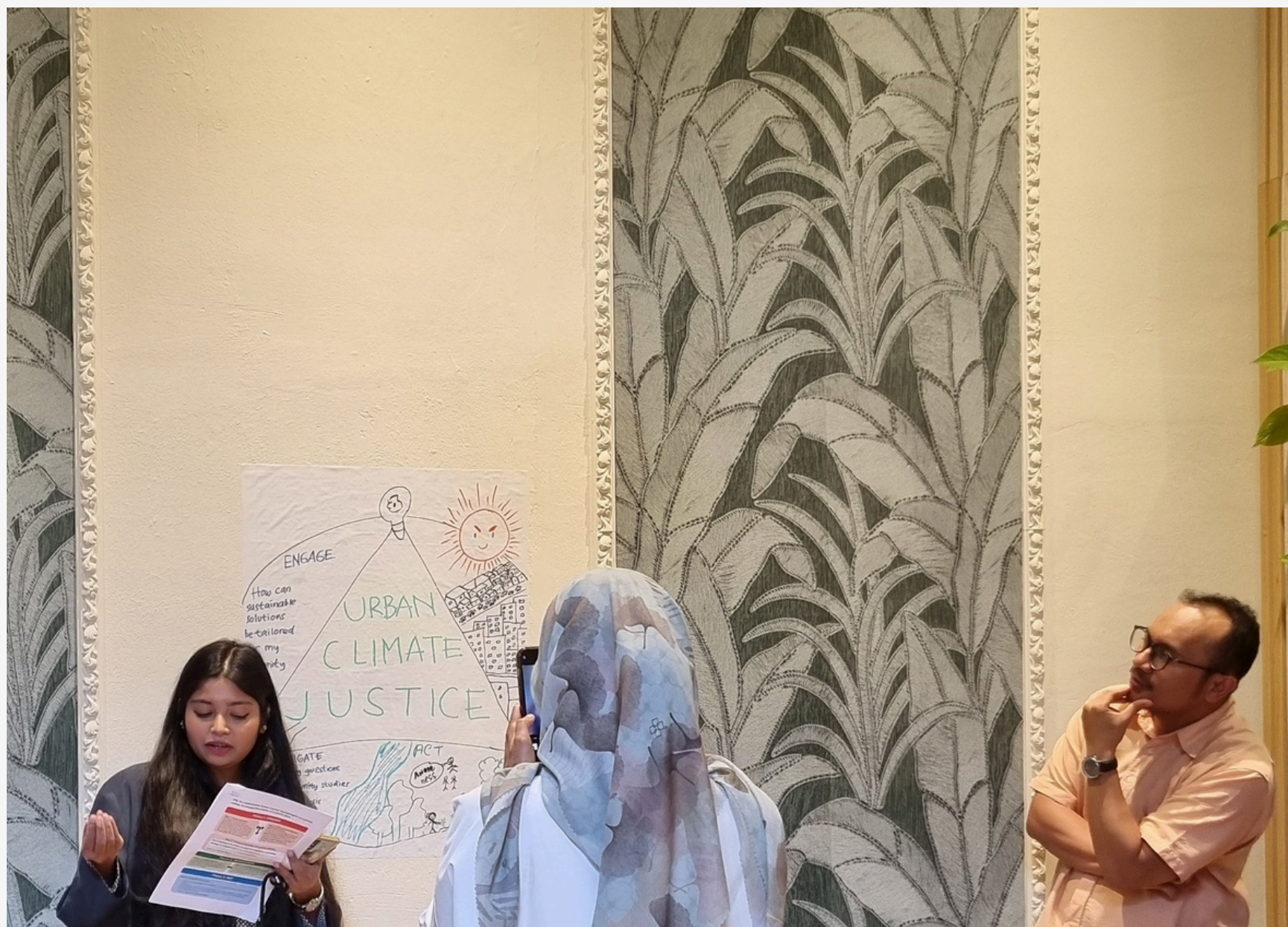
UNITING FOR PLANETARY HEALTH: THE CATA-EARTH ANNUAL MEETING

The 2025 CATA-Earth (Catalysing Transformative Change in Planetary Health Education) project Annual Meeting, hosted at UMC Utrecht in the Netherlands, brought together an exceptional coalition of partners from the Netherlands, Spain, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. It served as a strategic moment for institutions committed to transforming how planetary health is taught, understood, and practiced.

Representatives from UMC Utrecht, Elevate BV (Netherlands), Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Spain), the Asian University for Women (AUW), Noakhali Science and Technology University (NSTU) (Bangladesh), Universitas Indonesia, Gadjah Mada University (Indonesia) convened to reflect on progress and co-design the next phase of collaboration. The meeting strengthened trust, deepened partnerships, and advanced a shared vision for the future of planetary health education.

Interactive sessions emphasized enhancing pedagogy through Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) and interdisciplinary methods—key strategies for preparing students to address complex environmental and health challenges. Joint planning exercises set priorities for the coming year, aligning goals and reinforcing CATA-Earth's mission.

More than an administrative milestone, the annual meeting reaffirmed a global commitment to building resilient, future-ready education systems. Together, partners are shaping a world where planetary health becomes not only a field of study but a shared responsibility.



UTRECHT Summer School



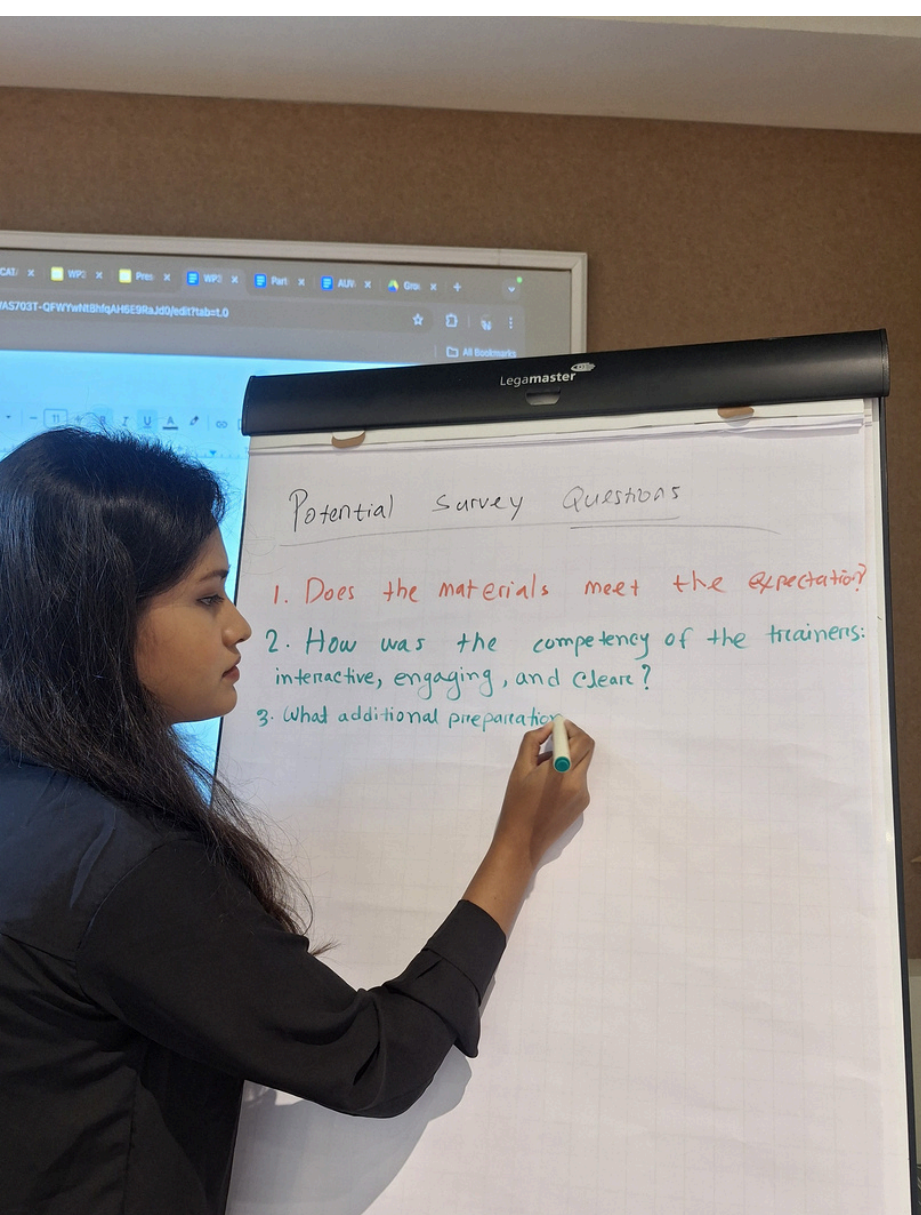
This summer, the Center for Climate Change and Environmental Health (3CEH) marked an important milestone as a five-member delegation participated in the prestigious “Planetary Health: Towards a Just Future” summer school hosted by Utrecht University. The 3CEH team—Ms. Sadia Salim, Ms. Tahiya Tasnim, Mr. Shajadha Md Abu Horaira, Ms. Sal Sabila, and Ms. Mst. Sohana Akter—joined the program to strengthen their understanding of ongoing CATA-EARTH project and to enhance their capacity to contribute effectively to evidence-based, community-driven planetary health initiatives.

Bringing together scholars, practitioners, and young professionals from across the globe, the summer school offered an extraordinary platform for the 3CEH team to explore cutting-edge frameworks at the intersection of climate science, public health, policy, and justice. For an institution working closely with Bangladesh’s most

climate-vulnerable communities, this opportunity was both timely and transformative.

The program began with a grounding in the right to health as a universal entitlement, exploring how breached planetary boundaries, environmental degradation, and structural inequalities create disproportionate health burdens. These discussions resonated strongly with the realities faced in Kutubdia, coastal villages, and informal settlements in Chittagong, providing the team with a global perspective on local challenges.

Over the course of the week, participants engaged with a broad range of themes: the exposome, biodiversity loss, corporate and political determinants of health, climate-related mental health, post-growth economic thinking, and decolonisation as political praxis.



Each session challenged the team to think beyond technical solutions and consider how justice, equity, and community leadership must guide planetary health research and action.

For 3CEH, these insights directly strengthened their capacity to design interventions that address climate impacts in Bangladesh, from water scarcity and food insecurity to mental health stressors and environmental degradation. The program reinforced the importance of integrating social, ecological, and psychological dimensions into research and community engagement.

A particularly engaging component was the collaborative case study workshop. Teams tackled real-world challenges, from mangrove restoration in Kenya to agricultural transformations in the Netherlands, and climate-linked skin diseases in Kutubdia, Bangladesh. These sessions offered valuable comparative insights and highlighted the critical role of local leadership in developing context-specific solutions.

Beyond technical learning, the summer school provided opportunities for the 3CEH team to build international networks, exchange knowledge, and share Bangladesh's experiences with a global audience. Their active participation showcased 3CEH's growing leadership in planetary health research and reinforced the center's commitment to justice-driven, community-led work.

The Utrecht summer school was more than a training—it was a catalyst for vision, collaboration, and renewed purpose. The 3CEH team returns with enriched expertise, strengthened global perspectives, and a renewed commitment to advancing evidence-based, equitable, and community-led planetary health initiatives across Bangladesh.



STRENGTHENING THE AUW-IDRC PARTNERSHIP

The Center for Climate Change and Environmental Health (3CEH) had the privilege of welcoming Dr. Kundan Mishra, Senior Program Officer from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), to the Asian University for Women (AUW) on 26 April. Dr. Mishra, who leads the Democratic and Inclusive Governance programming in South Asia, engaged deeply with students and researchers, reinforcing the shared commitment to inclusive development and evidence-driven change.

A highlight of the visit was Dr. Mishra's conversation with the IDRC Fellows from Myanmar's ethnic minority backgrounds, who shared their academic journeys, personal aspirations, and the transformative role that the IDRC-3CEH partnership has played in expanding their opportunities. Their reflections underscored the power of equitable access to education and the importance of supporting young scholars whose voices are often underrepresented in development spaces.

During the 3CEH project briefing, Ms. Sadia Salim, Community Development Officer, delivered a comprehensive presentation on the progress of the Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar (K4DM) initiative and 3CEH's ongoing community-centered research. The session — facilitated by Ms. Tahiya Tasnim — sparked a dynamic dialogue with Dr. Mishra, who shared thoughtful insights on governance, civic engagement, and pathways to strengthen research ecosystems.

The visit continued with an in-depth research showcase, where Naema Fatema, Mst. Sohana Akter, Sal-Sabila, Sadia Salim, and Arap Jahan Nodi presented their thesis findings. Their work demonstrated the growing research capacity at AUW, highlighting the university's commitment to generating knowledge that informs policy, empowers communities, and drives sustainable development.

Dr. Mishra's visit celebrated the achievements of young scholars, particularly the IDRC Fellows from Myanmar's marginalized ethnic backgrounds, and reaffirmed a shared vision of advancing inclusive, democratic, and community-driven futures across the region.



CONGRATULATIONS!



We proudly celebrate Md. Akib Javed as he embarks on his PhD at Wageningen University and Research, the Netherlands, specializing in Empowerment, Locally-led Development, and Climate Adaptation. His PhD research focuses on marginalized communities of Chars (remote riverine islands) in Bangladesh. With a decade of impactful, interdisciplinary research spanning climate-induced loss and damage, nature-based solutions, public health, and marginalized communities, Mr. Javed bridges community-grounded insights with global climate and environmental challenges. Before starting his PhD, he served as Coordinator of 3CEH at AUW, where he led pioneering research, advocacy, and capacity-building initiatives—empowering women researchers and strengthening climate resilience across vulnerable Asian communities. Holding Master’s degrees from Erasmus University Rotterdam and the University of Chittagong, Mr. Javed has contributed to national and international projects since 2015, publishing widely and presenting at leading academic and policy forums. His work continues to drive fresh insights into empowerment, locally-led solutions, and climate adaptation, centering the voices and experiences of those most affected.



Celebrating the remarkable journey of Tahiya Tasnim, Research Assistant (Academic) at 3CEH, as she advances her studies with a Master’s in Global Business and Economy at Algoma University, Canada. She completed her Bachelor’s in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics (PPE) at the Asian University for Women, a foundation that nurtured her interdisciplinary perspective and fueled her passion for understanding systemic challenges, equity, and the intersection of policy, society, and sustainable development. Her work in several international projects at 3CEH reflects transformative impact across planetary health, WASH, urban climate resilience, and refugee education, directly benefiting hundreds of students and vulnerable communities while translating research into policy-relevant action. Her unique leadership, vision, and commitment to bridging local realities with global solutions exemplify the next generation of changemakers. Her work demonstrates exceptional strength in strategic coordination, evidence-based program design, and cross-border collaboration, alongside a deep dedication to mentoring marginalized and displaced learners and amplifying community voices. Through her Master’s, she aims to further sharpen her capacity to design innovative, inclusive, and scalable solutions, positioning herself as a leader shaping policy, practice, and sustainable impact.

CONGRATULATIONS!



We congratulate Sal Sabila, former Research Assistant (Community Development) at 3CEH, on receiving a full Chinese Government Scholarship (CSC) to pursue her Master's in Environmental Science & Engineering at the University of Science and Technology Beijing (USTB). As a graduate of AUW with a major in Environmental Science, she combines strong academic training with a deep commitment to grassroots community engagement and environmental stewardship. At 3CEH, she was instrumental in supporting initiatives in climate-vulnerable communities, assisting fieldwork and research that informed practical, locally tailored approaches to resilience and sustainability. She excels in building trust-driven relationships and empowering communities, with a focus on climate challenges and waste management. Her ability to translate environmental research into actionable strategies at the grassroots level enables communities to better anticipate and adapt to climate risks. Through her dedication, hands-on experience, and leadership in collaborative projects, Ms. Sal Sabila has made a meaningful contribution to advancing resilient and thriving communities, and her Master's will position her to pioneer sustainable approaches that help communities adapt and thrive in the face of climate change.



Meet our Earth Advocate! Sadia Salim, Community Development Officer at 3CEH, is a 2025 WEDU Earth Advocate Award recipient for her contributions to women's empowerment, environmental health, WASH, climate change resilience, planetary health, research, and policy advocacy. At 3CEH, Ms. Sadia has led field research teams, project operations, awareness campaigns, workshops, international conferences, and symposiums, while helping Rohingya girls access higher education at AUW and creating mentored, paid research opportunities for AUW students. She transformed community experiences from Kutubdia Island into a policy brief on climate-linked skin diseases, advocating for government-level action together with her 3CEH team. She is an AUW alumna, BSc in Environmental Sciences and Public Health (Double Major). Her independent research on water insecurity in Sultanpur village, Raozan, Chattogram, earned her the Best Senior Thesis Award 2023 and was later published in a Springer journal after rigorous peer review. Guided by her training in environmental sciences and public health, and through her community-based work with 3CEH, Ms. Sadia remains committed to the belief that no one is too small to make a difference.



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Since its launch in 2017, the Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar Initiative (K4DM) has been driving positive change by empowering researchers and enhancing the role of research and higher education in shaping evidence-based public policy. Now entering its second phase, K4DM is committed to advancing inclusion, diversity, gender equality, and democratic principles through research fellowships, policy training, and cross-border capacity-building initiatives. The program is a collaborative effort between the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Global Affairs Canada.

