



Sydney Southeast Asia Research Innovation Symposium

*From Ideas to Impact:
Tackling Grand Challenges through Collaboration*

Thursday, 6 November 2025

10:30am–4:00pm AEDT

In-person and livestreamed

The Refectory, Holme Building

Science Road, The University of Sydney



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY
—
Sydney Southeast
Asia Centre

From Ideas to Impact: Tackling Grand Challenges through Collaboration

The 2025 Sydney Southeast Asia Research Innovation Symposium explores how collaborative research can effectively tackle the complex and interconnected grand challenges facing Southeast Asia. From climate change, gender inequality, public health crises and economic transformation to digital governance and sustainable development, the region's challenges are wicked problems that transcend single disciplines and demand integrated solutions.

This year's Symposium brings together academics, practitioners and partners from across Australia and Southeast Asia to showcase the University of Sydney's commitment to research with real-world impact. By fostering collaboration, co-design and a deep understanding of local contexts, the Symposium aims to spark new cross-faculty and cross-sector partnerships that support Australia's strategic priorities in the region.

The Sydney Southeast Asia Centre invites you to actively participate in dialogue and co-creation to identify innovative approaches that can drive measurable social, environmental and economic change in the region. By working together, we can harness our collective expertise and invest in partnerships that help pave the way towards sustainable futures. Together we can turn ideas into impactful outcomes and create real change.

Have a burning idea for a research project on Southeast Asia?

Click on the code and fill in a short form to register your research innovation idea to unlock access to SSEAC's research funding and development support.



Program

Time	Session	Details
10:30am – 10:35am	Acknowledgement of Country	Dr Sandra Alday Deputy Director, Partnerships
10:35am – 10:45am	Opening Remarks	Professor Greg Fox Director, Sydney Southeast Asia Centre
SYMPOSIUM		
10:45am – 11:05am	Keynote Address	Bill Costello Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Office of Southeast Asia
11:05am – 11:25am	Keynote Address	Eleanor Keppelman Investing in Women
11:25am – 11:45am	<i>Audience Q&A</i>	
11:45am – 12:00pm	SSEAC Awards	Presented by Professor Greg Fox
12:00pm – 1:00pm	Lunch	Drawing Room, The Refectory
RESEARCH PROGRAM		
1:00pm – 1:05pm	Welcome	Dr Sandra Alday
1:05pm – 1:30pm	Panel Discussion: <i>Challenges and Opportunities of Collaborative Research</i>	Chair: Professor Tiho Ancev Deputy Director, Research Development <ul style="list-style-type: none">– A/Prof Susan Banki Sydney Environment Institute– Professor Deanna D'Alessandro Net Zero Institute– A/Prof Leigh-Anne Hepburn Sydney Policy Lab– Professor Dan Tan Sydney Southeast Asia Centre
1:30pm – 3:00pm	Collaborative Research Discussion Groups <i>Break into Grand Challenges groups</i>	Lead: Dr Sandra Alday Facilitators: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– A/Prof Susan Banki– Dr Lynda-Ann Blanchard– Olivia Simmons– Professor Dan Tan– Dr Nate Zettna
3:00pm – 4:00pm	Afternoon tea and networking	The Courtyard, Holme Building

Keynote Speakers



Bill Costello, Office of Southeast Asia, DFAT

Bill Costello is Australia's Assistant Secretary, Southeast Asia Development Policy and Programs, at the Office of Southeast Asia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). From July to September 2025, he oversaw Australia's relations with Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei. He also served as Australia's Ambassador to Timor-Leste from 2021 to 2023. Mr Costello is a highly experienced public servant, international development professional and Pacific expert, with strong knowledge of Southeast Asia, public policy, program and budget management, economics, health policy, humanitarian response and multilateral development institutions. With over two decades of diplomatic experience, he leads Australia's engagement with Southeast Asia, including trade, investment and development programs that advance sustainable and inclusive growth.



Eleanor Keppelman, Investing in Women

Eleanor Keppelman is the Impact Investing Director with Investing in Women (IW), an initiative of the Australian Government. As Impact Investing Director, Ms Keppelman leads a team to carry out IW's investing activities, with the goal of increasing investment capital to businesses that disproportionately benefit women across Southeast Asia. Prior to joining IW, she was an investment officer with the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), where she led debt transactions into social enterprises and impact funds operating in low and lower middle-income countries. She was also part of the DFC team implementing the agency's 2X Women's Initiative. Ms Keppelman is a passionate investment professional who has spent much of her career focused on promoting women's economic empowerment through the mobilisation of capital.

SSEAC Management



Professor Greg Fox, Director

Greg Fox is the Director of the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre and a Professor of Respiratory Medicine in the Faculty of Medicine and Health. Greg is an international clinical trialist and epidemiologist whose research focuses upon tuberculosis (TB) and chronic lung disease. Over the past fifteen years, he has established a clinical research group in Vietnam which has conducted multicentre studies into the prevention and detection of TB in resource-limited settings. His research, in combination with evidence reviews for the World Health Organization, have contributed to changes in global TB policies and clinical practice. He is strongly committed to building research capacity in Australia and internationally.



Dr Sandra Alday, Deputy Director Partnerships

Sandra Alday is Deputy Director, Partnerships, at the Sydney Southeast Centre and Program Director of the Master of Management at the University of Sydney Business School. Her research focuses on the nature, perception and management of risk, and its impact on equity and sustainability in Southeast Asia. She also explores how transformative learning can reshape approaches to risk and sustainability. Previously she worked in strategy and organisation development consulting. She was also a Past President of the Society for Risk Analysis – Australia and New Zealand. Sandra is an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Management Education* and actively involved in the international Society for Risk Analysis where she was a former Councillor.



Professor Tiho Ancev, Deputy Director, Research Development

Tiho Ancev is a Professor of Agricultural and Resource Economics at the University's School of Economics. He is a member of the SSEAC Executive and member of the executive of the Sydney Vietnam Academic Network. His research interests are in the economics of climate change, the economics of agricultural policy, and the economics of water, energy and the environment. Tiho has researched on these topics in various regions of the world, including in Southeast Asia, primarily in Vietnam and Indonesia. He was the Managing Editor-in-Chief of the *Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics* until 2023.



Olivia Simmons, Chief Operating Officer

Olivia Simmons brings experience in program management, partnerships, operations and funding at local and international organisations. With a background in humanitarian and development programming, Olivia has designed and led initiatives in Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and the Philippines. Olivia has led strategic and operational projects with NGOs, United Nations agencies, the private sector and Universities. Previously she was in the University of Sydney's Research and Advancement portfolios, where she led major initiatives to grow externally funded research and established the University's first international foundations strategy and team. Olivia is passionate about aligning diverse stakeholder priorities to drive equity, sustainability and real-world impact.

Panellists and facilitators



Associate Professor Susan Banki

Susan Banki is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Director of the Master of Social Justice. She studies the political, institutional, and social contexts that explain the roots of and solutions to human rights violations and social justice abuses. Her research focuses on how sovereignty, transnationalism, and citizenship/membership have shaped our responses to conflict and injustice. She has conducted extensive field research on refugee/migrant protection, statelessness and border control in the Asia-Pacific region, including in Thailand, Myanmar/Burma, Cambodia, Nepal, Bangladesh and Japan. Her current projects include: the work of diasporas in responding to acute crises at home; humanitarian responses to complex displacement contexts; and the role of creative arts in transnational activism. She is the Myanmar Country Convenor at the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre



Dr Lynda-Ann Blanchard

Lynda-Ann Blanchard is International Advisor at Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e (UNTL), where she assisted in establishing the integrated postgraduate degrees in Peace and Conflict Studies. Her work spans national and international research focused on cultural difference and social justice, including in the areas of non-adversarial policy and practice, human security and global governance, tourism as corporate social responsibility, and issues of Indigenous self-determination. She is the Timor-Leste Country Convenor at the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre.



Professor Deanna D'Alessandro

Deanna D'Alessandro is the Director of the Net Zero Institute, which aims to help government, industry and communities swiftly manufacture, deploy and adopt cost-effective, low emissions technologies at scale. She works in partnership with the Institute's researchers and industry and scientific advisory boards to accelerate the development and responsible deployment of net zero technologies and solutions. She is also a chemist in the Faculties of Engineering and Science, where she is leading the development of materials for a novel carbon-removal process – known as direct air capture – where historical carbon dioxide emissions are removed from the air. She is passionate about multidisciplinary efforts to address climate change.

Panellists and facilitators



Associate Professor Leigh-Anne Hepburn

Leigh-Anne Hepburn is the Head of Design at the Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning. She is also Deputy Director (Design) at the Sydney Policy Lab where she applies her expertise in design-enabled collaboration to address complex policy issues. An international leader in policy and design, she has worked with community members and governments on impact-focused projects. Her experience includes time spent in local government, health innovation and consulting. She specialises in design research and practice, employing creative and participatory approaches to co-creation. Her work intersects with fields such as health and care, resilience and social impact.



Professor Daniel Tan

Daniel Tan is Professor in the Faculty of Science and Postgraduate Coursework Program Director (Master of Agriculture and Food), Theme Lead (Development Agriculture), Sydney Institute of Agriculture, and Node Lead (Agriculture, Food and Environment), Sydney Vietnam Institute. He is also the Food Safety Lead in the CGIAR FRESH/Better Food and Nutrition project. His research interests include crop agronomy, specialising in crop abiotic stress, postharvest management and food safety in farming systems. His ongoing impactful research on farming systems and food safety has been supported by the Grains Research and Development Corporation, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, the International Food Policy Research Institute and the World Bank. He is the Cambodia Country Convenor at the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre.



Dr Nate Zettina

Nate Zettina is a Lecturer in Leadership and Organisational Behaviour at the Sydney Business School. He is also Associate Head (Research Education), where he coordinates the Higher Degree by Research (PhD and MPhil) program for the Discipline of Work and Organisational Studies. His research focuses on team effectiveness, exploring key areas such as team leadership, frontline service teams, team age diversity, and team well-being and performance. His work spans multiple sectors, including banking, financial services, government, healthcare, manufacturing, and education, where he has collaborated with organisations in various countries to drive impactful research and practice. He is the Thailand Country Convenor at the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre.

The Sydney Southeast Asia Centre (SSEAC) is Australia's leading multidisciplinary research centre focused on Southeast Asia. Since its establishment in 2012, SSEAC has been pivotal in developing the University of Sydney's reputation for research excellence across the 11 countries of Southeast Asia (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam). SSEAC's strengths lie in its disciplinary breadth, multidisciplinary collaborations and comprehensive coverage of Southeast Asia.

SSEAC brings together more than 490 academics from across the University working in Southeast Asia and supports the knowledge, skills and networks required to undertake impactful research and foster trusted research partnerships in the region.

For more information

Sydney Southeast Asia Centre

+61 2 9114 0953

sseac@sydney.edu.au

sydney.edu.au/sseac

SSEAC Socials

f [sydneysoutheastasiacentre](https://www.facebook.com/sydneysoutheastasiacentre)

in [sydney-southeast-asia-centre](https://www.instagram.com/sydney-southeast-asia-centre)

▶ [SydneySoutheastAsiaCentre](https://www.youtube.com/SydneySoutheastAsiaCentre)

Photo credits: Cover, Adobe images

We recognise and pay respect to the Elders and communities – past, present, and emerging – of the lands that the University of Sydney's campuses stand on. For thousands of years they have shared and exchanged knowledges across innumerable generations for the benefit of all.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY