

CO-CREATING THE FUTURE

Science, Technology, and Innovation for Development



15-16 DECEMBER 2026



TOKYO, JAPAN

HOSTED BY
GDN Global Development Network



GDC 2026 will be organised in partnership with the Delegation of the European Union (EU) to Japan, the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI), World Bank Group Tokyo Development Learning Center, and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF).

VISION AND RATIONALE

A 25-Year Legacy of Development Innovation

In December 2026, the Global Development Network (GDN) will convene a landmark diplomatic and policy summit in Tokyo, Japan. This event marks the 25th Anniversary of the Global Development Awards Competition (GDAC), one of the world's longest-running programmes supporting locally led research and development innovation.

Supported by the Japanese Ministry of Finance since 2000, GDAC has invested more than US\$ 4.2 million in identifying, mentoring, and amplifying the work of over 420 researchers and civil society organisations across the Global South. Over the past 25 years, the programme has demonstrated the effectiveness of targeted Official Development Assistance (ODA), enabling awardees to secure follow-on funding from a wide array of global bilateral, multilateral, and philanthropic donors.

The conference will provide an opportunity to reflect on the programme's achievements and explore its broader contributions to global development. A major highlight will be the **launch of a comprehensive impact study and accompanying documentary**, showcasing the long-term influence of GDAC-supported initiatives.

The "Tokyo Portfolio" will be launched as a set of scale-up concepts built on projects previously implemented by GDN grantees, each adding a science, technology or innovation component. The portfolio will provide the first cohort of projects for the new AI pillar of GDN's Research Facility on Inclusive Digital Transformation, which is launched at GDC 2027. The AI pillar addresses what the existing work does not, namely securing computing infrastructure, building local-language datasets, and measuring the socio-economic impact of AI in the Global South.

GDAC 2026 Finals: Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) for Peace and Human Security

At the heart of this summit are the live finals of the 2026 GDAC edition, held under the theme: "Science, Technology, and Innovation for Peace and Human Security". This theme reflects a critical global mandate to deploy technology and rigorous research not just for economic growth, but also to build resilient, peaceful, and secure societies. Finalists from across the Global South will present their research and development initiatives to an international jury and audience, culminating in the announcement of the 2026 award recipients. By showcasing finalists who are already deploying STI to protect vulnerable populations, GDN sets the stage for a broader, forward-looking dialogue.

A Global Hub for Evidence-Based Partnership and Systemic Scale

GDN's 2018 Global Development Conference, held in New Delhi in March 2018 with UNIDO, the Campbell Collaboration and the Institute for Studies on Industrial Development, addressed the same theme. It concluded that many innovations work at small scale while the pathways to scale and replication remain poorly understood, and that co-creation is difficult on the ground because agencies working on complementary problems rarely know of one another. GDC 2026 is built to act on those findings, replacing conference panels with structured matchmaking that produces designed partnerships.

As the global development architecture shifts toward models of "Co-Creation" and horizontal partnership, this summit marks a strategic pivot for GDN. In addition to celebrating past impact, we are actively working towards incubating future solutions. As a neutral, treaty-based international organisation, GDN is uniquely positioned to act as a bridge between the Global South and the Global North. By leveraging scientific collaboration to build international trust and tackle shared planetary crises, this event serves as a practical exercise in science diplomacy. GDN's Research Facility on Inclusive Digital Transformation already supports implementation research through its pillar on digital public infrastructure. The AI pillar extends it, and the Tokyo pilots provide its first cohort of projects. Crucially, the concepts incubated in Tokyo will serve as the foundational "proofs of concept" for the AI pillar, formally launched at GDC 2027.

Over two days, we will unite 150 stakeholders - pairing Global South innovators with global Solution Partners and Scalars - to address a defining challenge: **How can global coalitions effectively leverage Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) to scale local pilots into systemic, national impacts?**

THEMATIC FOCUS: SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION (STI) FOR DEVELOPMENT

The conference focuses on locally led solutions to the polycrisis, aligned with the strategic priorities of our global partners, from Japan's Society 5.0 to the EU's Global Gateway and the African Union's Agenda 2063. We define our overarching "STI" theme through a locally led lens.

- Science: This explicitly centres on rigorous Social Science (economics, political economy, impact evaluation). We provide the evidence-based data-driven approaches required by global donors to prove a solution is viable for scale.
- Technology: We focus on the application of physical and digital tools which ranges from Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and AI-enabled health diagnostics to climate-resilient agriculture and Blue Economy innovations.

- Innovation: We prioritise Social and Institutional Innovation such as new community governance models or inclusive financing mechanisms, ensuring technology serves human security and marginalised populations.

Digitalisation / Inclusive Digital Transformation serves as accelerator within this umbrella, reflecting the growing global mandate to bridge the divide across Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific.

CO-CREATION LABS

GDN's 25-year portfolio spans a vast array of development sectors from education and human security to biodiversity, trade, and employment generation. To ensure focused and actionable outcomes, the Co-Creation Labs will channel these diverse projects through two macro-thematic hubs aligned with global funding priorities. GDN grantees and Alumni from all sectors are encouraged to participate, provided their scale-up challenge intersects with one of these broad frameworks:

Inclusive Digital Transformation and Sustainable Economies (Hosted in partnership with ADBI)

Focusing on how digital public infrastructure, green technology, and the Blue Economy can drive inclusive economic growth across various sectors (including education, agriculture, and trade).

Health Innovation, Governance and Resilient Societies (Hosted in partnership with the World Bank Group Tokyo Development Learning Center)

Focusing on institutional innovation, universal health coverage, and urban and disaster resilience to build secure, human-centred societies and sustainable cities.

Working Tracks

At each hub, pods composed by different key players led by a GDN Grantee or Alumnus will work through specific development challenges utilising three tracks:

- Scale and Optimise (Track A): For projects that already utilise digital tools, data, or green technologies among others within the STI umbrella. The challenge is scaling the physical/digital infrastructure globally (e.g., upgrading a localised digital health platform to integrate with national Digital Public Infrastructure frameworks).
- Innovation Pivot (Track B): For traditional development models seeking to design a digital or innovative governance layer. Focuses on institutional innovation, analogue-to-digital transitions, and community tech without advanced machine learning.
- AI Frontier (Track C): For projects requiring advanced Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, or Large Language Models (LLMs) to overcome massive scale bottlenecks. Focuses on securing computing infrastructure, building local-language datasets, and measuring the socio-economic impact of AI in the Global South.

"Tokyo Portfolio"

By the end of the session, each pod will produce a standardised Project Scale-Up Concept which will be compiled into the "Tokyo Portfolio". These concepts will serve as a concrete catalogue of innovative Japan-Global South, North-South, and South-South partnerships ready for institutional incubation and scale-up funding (such as the Japan Social Development Fund, the EU Global Gateway, or international philanthropic grants).

AUDIENCE

Total Participants: Approximately 150

- Approximately 50 Japanese officials and experts
- Approximately 100 international participants

The audience has been carefully designed to ensure a balance of expertise, diversity, and meaningful interaction. The primary objective for Japanese stakeholders is to engage directly with high-quality, rigorously vetted innovations and evidence emerging from the Global South. By ensuring a strong presence of international participants, the conference will create a rich ecosystem of ground-level experience, applied research, and implementation insights.

AGENDA OVERVIEW

DAY 1: GDN Legacy and Cooperation

Objective: Showcasing grassroots talent and facilitating evidence-based co-creation.

09:00 – 12:30 | Welcome and GDAC 2026 Finals

Venue: Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF)

- High-Level Welcome Remarks.
- Live Pitches: Finalists for the Japanese Award for Outstanding Research (ORD) and Japanese Award for Most Innovative Development Project (MIDP) awards present scalable solutions under the theme "Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) for Peace and Human Security" to a high-level jury of global experts.

12:45 – 14:00 | Lunch and Transit to Co-Creation Hubs

14:15 – 17:00 | Co-Creation Labs

Venues: ADBI and the World Bank

Structured collaboration roundtables where GDN Grantees and Alumni team up with Solution Partners and Scalars to co-design the scalable interventions that will form the "Tokyo Portfolio". The thematic focus of each venue took into consideration priority focus areas of their respective hosts.

THEMATIC FOCUS OF SESSIONS

- **Thematic Room 1:** Inclusive Digital Transformation & Sustainable Economies.
- **Thematic Room 2:** Health Innovation, Governance & Resilient Societies.

18:30 – 21:00 | 25th Anniversary Cultural Reception (TBC)

Venue: A culturally significant venue (e.g., Happo-en, a museum space, or a traditional Japanese banquet hall)

The reception will open with a *Kagami-biraki* ceremony (traditional sake barrel opening), featuring the GDN President alongside senior representatives from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Asian Development Bank Institute, the World Bank, European Union, and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. Participants will jointly strike the wooden sake barrel with traditional mallets, symbolising unity and collective commitment. This culturally significant ritual serves as a powerful and visually compelling moment to "open a new chapter of partnership," reflecting both respect for Japanese tradition and the spirit of co-creation that underpins the conference.

DAY 2: Global Policy Symposium and GDAC Spotlight

Objective: Elevating the conversation to global policy, leveraging international scientific cooperation to scale innovations.

09:30 – 12:30 | Global Policy Symposium **Venue:** *Delegation of the EU to Japan (Europa House)*

- Morning Keynote: The Importance of Global South-North Research Cooperation.
- High-Level Panel: "Beyond 2030: Co-Creating Financing Mechanisms to Move Local Pilots to National Scale".
- "Voices of the Global South" Panel: GDN Alumni and other representatives discuss how early-career funding altered national policy trajectories across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

12:30 – 14:30 | 25-Year Impact Lunch **Venue:** *Delegation of the EU to Japan (Europa House)*

- Networking lunch featuring the "25 Years of GDAC" impact posters as well as from GDN programmes and Japanese partners and co-hosts.

14:30 – 16:30 | GDAC Awards Ceremony and Closing **Venue:** *Delegation of the EU to Japan (Europa House)*

- Impact Premiere: Screening of the GDAC 25-Year Impact Documentary.
- Awards Presentation: Announcement of the 2026 GDAC (ORD and MIDP categories) Winners.
- Closing Vision: GDN leadership and key funding partners officially close the 25-year chapter of GDAC, exploring new pathways for science diplomacy and multi-donor, implementation-focused development cooperation including the Tokyo Portfolio as an example. Announcement of the 2027 Global Development Conference.

16:30 | Closing Cocktail Reception (TBC)

ABOUT THE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

The Global Development Conference is GDN's flagship event, held in a different region and on a different theme each year, with most participants from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Twenty-five editions have been held in 20 host countries on five continents.

The conference gives early-career and established researchers a platform to present their own work and exchange ideas directly with policymakers, building a global network that outlasts each edition. It offers Southern perspectives on sustainable development and feeds back into how development cooperation is designed and evaluated.



Who is in the room

Across 25 editions, delegates have consistently come predominantly from LMICs, with some editions drawing more than 90% participation from developing and transition economies. Every in-person edition of the conference has drawn between 350 and 700 participants.

Who is on the stage

Sitting heads of state and government have addressed six of the 25 editions. Keynote and plenary speakers have included leading voices in development economics, and LMIC representation on stage has remained consistently high across editions.

SUPPORTERS OF GDN AND GDC

Since 1999, GDN and its flagship conference have been supported by government agencies from 26 countries, eight multilateral development banks, and institutions across the United Nations system. Japanese institutions have been part of that record throughout, a connection that comes full circle with this year's edition hosted in Japan.

Multilateral development banks and financial institutions

African Development Bank · Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development · Asian Development Bank · Corporación Andina de Fomento · European Investment Bank · Inter-American Development Bank · International Monetary Fund · The World Bank

Governments and development agencies

Agence Française de Développement · Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia · Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany · Government of Egypt · Government of Fiji · International Development Research Centre, Canada · Japan Bank for International Cooperation · Japan International Cooperation Agency · Korea International Cooperation Agency · Ministry of Education, Peru · Ministry of Finance, India · Ministry of Finance, Japan · Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Czech Republic · Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands · Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation · Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation

United Nations system and intergovernmental bodies

European Commission · International Labour Organization · OECD Development Centre · UN Economic Commission for Africa · UN Industrial Development Organization · UNICEF · United Nations Development Programme · UNU-WIDER · World Health Organization

Foundations

Ford Foundation · Gates Foundation · Michelin Foundation · OCP Foundation · Open Society Foundations · Robert Bosch Foundation · Sasakawa Peace Foundation · William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Universities and research institutions

African Economic Research Consortium · Campbell Collaboration · CERDI · Central European University · Economic Research Forum · FERDI · German Institute of Development and Sustainability · Institute for Studies in Industrial Development · Mohammed VI Polytechnic University · Peking University · Universidad de los Andes · Universidad del Pacífico · Universidad San Francisco de Quito · University of Ghana · University of the South Pacific