#### **FORUM**



# **Sustainability Nexus AID: landslides and land subsidence**

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#### **Abstract**

Landslides and land subsidence pose signifcant threats that are both existing and growing in nature. These complex phenomena should not be considered in isolation but rather as interconnected challenges. To efectively understand and mitigate them, a data-driven nexus approach is necessary. Recognizing the importance of addressing this issue comprehensively, the United Nations University has launched the Sustainability Nexus Analytics, Informatics and Data Programme, a comprehensive initiative that intends to enable the nexus approach to problem solving in coupled human– environment systems. This paper provides a detailed background on the Programme's "Landslides and Land Subsidence Module", underscoring the crucial need for a nexus approach. Additionally, it highlights some of the tools and strategies that can be employed to tackle the challenges at hand. The success of this initiative hinges on active participation from various stakeholders. By embracing a holistic approach and fostering collaboration, we can strive towards better preparedness and long-term resilience against landslides and land subsidence.

**Keywords** Analytics · Informatics · Data · Landslide · Land subsidence · Remoting sensing · Artifcial intelligence · Sustainable development

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# **1 Why landslides and land subsidence matters**

Landslides and land subsidence are among geological hazards that can have devastating efects on infrastructure, human lives, the environment, and the sustainability of resources (Alimohammadlou et al. [2013](#page-8-0); Garg et al. [2022](#page-9-0); Haque et al. [2019](#page-9-1); Mallick et al. [2021](#page-10-0)). Landslides are natural hazards that involve the movement of rock, soil, or debris down a slope under the infuence of either gravity or external factors such as intense rainfall and/or earthquakes. They can occur in various forms, such as rockfalls, debris flows, mudslides, or avalanches, resulting in thousands of fatalities worldwide each year (Gariano & Guzzetti [2016](#page-9-2)). Land subsidence, referring to the gradual sinking of the Earth's surface, occurs when the support beneath the surface decreases or is removed, leading to the collapse of overlying layers and soil compaction (Gambolati et al. [1996](#page-9-3)). It can be caused by varied reasons including withdrawal of groundwater, oil, gas, and geothermal fuids, mining activities, tunneling, consolidation of certain types of soil, development of sinkholes in the karstic environment, or certain tectonic processes (Geertsma [1973](#page-9-4); Karanam et al. [2021;](#page-9-5) Karanam

& Lu [2023;](#page-9-6) Krishna & Lokhande [2022](#page-9-7); Motagh et al. [2008,](#page-10-1) [2017](#page-10-2); Oliver-Cabrera et al. [2022;](#page-10-3) Yu et al. [2021](#page-11-0)).

The issue of land subsidence and landslides is emerging as a critical global challenge, necessitating urgent attention and action (Bagheri-Gavkosh et al. [2021](#page-8-1); Stanley et al. [2021\)](#page-10-4). These geohazards, driven by a combination of natural processes and human activities, have widespread implications for communities, economies, and the environment (Fig. [1](#page-1-0)). Globally, land subsidence and landslide instances have been reported in numerous countries, impacting millions of people (Froude & Petley [2018](#page-9-8); Herrera-García et al. [2021a\)](#page-9-9). Economic losses attributed to these phenomena often amount to billions of dollars annually (Schuster [1996](#page-10-5); Grima et al. [2020](#page-9-10); Dinar et al. [2021](#page-8-2)). They pose a direct threat to buildings, bridges, transport networks, and other built structures on the ground, and to the underground infrastructure such as water pipes, sewage and drainage (Cigna & Tapete [2021;](#page-8-3) Bott et al. [2021](#page-8-4); Kadiyan et al. [2021](#page-9-11); Lyu et al. [2020](#page-10-6); Haghshenas et al. [2019](#page-9-12); Sundell et al. [2019\)](#page-10-7). In terms of social and environmental consequences, land subsidence and landslides lead to the loss of arable land and disruption of ecosystems (Göransson et al. [2018](#page-9-13)), and displacement of communities (Kato and Lee [2022\)](#page-9-14).

Projecting into the future, the circumstances seem increasingly challenging. Studies indicate that the frequency and severity of these geohazards are likely to escalate due to the increased frequency of extreme weather events, urbanization, and increasing resource demand (Ozturk et al. [2022](#page-10-8)). This trend points to an increased risk of global land movement making it an issue of immediate and pressing concern.

The relevance of addressing land subsidence and landslides extends to several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It aligns closely with SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), which focuses on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. The implications of these issues also intersect with other SDGs, such as SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). This intersectionality underscores the complexity of the problem and the necessity for integrated and comprehensive solutions to minimize the risks posed by landslides and land subsidence to communities and infrastructure.

# **2 The need for a nexus approach**

Land subsidence and landslides are not just physical phenomena; they are deeply intertwined with human activities such as urban development, groundwater extraction, and land use changes (Haghshenas et al. [2024a](#page-9-15); Mishra & Jain [2022](#page-10-9)). This interconnection means that solutions must consider not only geological and hydrological factors but also socio-economic, political, and environmental aspects. Climate change, deforestation, increased urbanization, and anthropogenic activities in mountainous

<span id="page-1-0"></span>**Fig. 1 a** Seafront of Pluit district in Jakarta (Indonesia), situated a few meters below mean sea level and protected from seawater by a concrete wall that needs to be raised every few years to counteract a land subsidence of 10–20 cm/year due to unsustainable groundwater withdrawal (photo by Pietro Teatini, September 20, 2019). **b** Damage to buildings and road caused by the March 2019 landslide at Hoseynabad-e Kalpush village in Iran (photo by Mahdi Motagh, July 30, 2019). **c** An example of a surface fssure due to groundwater extraction in Hormozgan province of southern Iran (photo credit: Mahdi Motagh, June 15, 2017). **d** A rockslide in the Mandakini Catchment in the Indian Himalayas along the National Highway (photo credit: Alok Bhardwaj, May 11, 2023)



regions have significant implications for triggering landslides. The impact of catastrophic slope failures can be magnifed when they coincide or are in close proximity to other disastrous events, such as dam failures. An example is that in 1963, when a massive mass slid into the newly built Vajont reservoir in northern Italy, creating a huge wave that broke through the dam and killed approximately 2,000 people (Genevois and Ghirotti [2005\)](#page-9-16). Moreover, landslides have profound effects on ecosystems, as they can lead to habitat loss, species extinction, soil erosion, changes in natural drainage system and loss of biodiversity (Li et al. [2022;](#page-10-10) Kato and Lee [2022](#page-9-14)). Land subsidence due to excessive pumping of groundwater can similarly afect ecosystems in a variety of ways including reduction in agricultural productivity and aquifer-system storage capacity, loss of wetlands, and facilitating saltwater intrusion into coastal freshwater aquifers. Changes in land elevation in urban areas damages buildings and civil infrastructure, and increase flood susceptibility and risk in coastal regions (Erban et al. [2014](#page-9-17)).

Policies on land use and water management have direct implications for the stability of land and can either mitigate or exacerbate the risk of landslides and subsidence (Vassileva et al. [2021](#page-10-11), [2023;](#page-10-12) Xia et al. [2022](#page-11-1)). Furthermore, these geohazards present signifcant trade-ofs and synergies that need careful consideration. Measures to prevent land subsidence, such as reducing groundwater extraction, can have economic implications for communities dependent on water resources. Similarly, efforts to control landslides through reforestation or land-use planning must balance ecological benefits against potential socio-economic impacts.

Instead of a siloed approach, a collaborative, interdisciplinary nexus approach enables specialists from various fields to pool their expertise. Geologists, hydrologists, and geomorphologists can analyse the physical and environmental factors contributing to landslides and subsidence. Engineers and urban planners can assess the implications on infrastructure and propose resilient designs. Earth observation experts and geospatial analysts can utilize advanced technologies to monitor and predict these hazards over time (Bally, [2012](#page-8-5)). Furthermore, a nexus approach recognizes the social and economic dimensions intertwined with landslides and land subsidence. Economists, social scientists, and environmental scientists can evaluate the impact of these hazards on communities, including economic and justice implications, displacement risks, and efects on local economies. This holistic view ensures that strategies not only address geological risks but also consider human welfare and livelihoods.

By incorporating geological, environmental, social, economic, and governance perspectives, the nexus approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of landslides and land subsidence. It ensures the development of wellrounded, sustainable strategies, balancing the need for risk mitigation with environmental conservation and community resilience. This multidisciplinary collaboration and the resulting comprehensive perspective based on the nexus approach (Brouwer et al. [2023\)](#page-8-6) can pave the way for hazard managers and policymakers to increase resilience against landslides and land subsidence.

# **3 The aid of the AID**

Addressing the complex challenges of land subsidence and landslides requires more than just an understanding of the physical phenomena involved. It also necessitates the use of tools that enable informed decision-making, promote transparency, and enhance literacy. To this aim, analytics, informatics, and data (AID) tools play a crucial role in managing these geohazards. One of the signifcant contributions of AID tools is their ability to support informed decision-making. By providing access to comprehensive data sets, advanced analytical tools, and state-of-the-art computational techniques, these tools empower scientists, policymakers, and local communities to develop a better understanding of the causes and potential impacts of land subsidence and landslides. This understanding is paramount in formulating targeted strategies for mitigation and adaptation. For example, an open database containing historical data on landslides and land subsidence can offer crucial insights for research (Herrera, et al. [2018;](#page-9-18) Wu et al. [2022;](#page-11-2) Haghshenas et al. [2024a](#page-9-15), [b](#page-9-19)). This data, combined with environmental factors like rainfall, topography, land cover, and geology with socio-economic data, such as population density and income levels, can help identify areas prone to high risk of subsidence and landslide hazard, and understand their potential impact on communities. Informatics tools can be used to simulate the efects of land-use changes on subsidence patterns, providing valuable insights for urban planners, mitigation strategists, and environmental managers.

Transparency is another critical aspect enhanced by the AID tools. By making complex data and analyses accessible and understandable using interactive data visualization tools, these tools help to create a bridge between science and policy by building trust among stakeholders, including local communities, government bodies, and international organizations (Pezanowski et al. [2008](#page-10-13); Maceda et al. [2009;](#page-10-14) Dransh et al., [2010](#page-8-7)). This transparency is essential for collaborative efforts and for gaining public support for necessary but potentially disruptive measures, such as relocation or changes in land use. The tools might also help in disseminating relevant knowledge and skills to a wider audience, including regions and communities that might otherwise lack access to such information. This is critical for empowering local stakeholders to participate actively in decision-making processes and for fostering community-led initiatives especially for management of risk and recovery from landslide disasters.

## **4 Sustainability Nexus AID programme: landslides and land subsidence**

In 2023, the United Nations University (UNU) initiated a pioneering collaborative programme in AID, dedicated to enabling the nexus approach in integrated resource management and sustainable development. This programme aims to develop an international collaboration network concentrating on the identifcation, development, and promotion of data, computational techniques, and analytical tools that are essential for the sustainable management of critical resources like water, soil, waste, energy, and geo-resources, guided by the principles of nexus thinking. The UNU Sustainability Nexus AID Programme ([https://www.sustainabilityaid.net/\)](https://www.sustainabilityaid.net/) is tailored to support and involve an international network of AID scientists and professionals. This network operates at the intersection of science, policy, and society, aiming to facilitate regional and global collaborative eforts that are aligned with achieving the UN 2030 SDGs.

The UNU Sustainability Nexus AID Programme has three pillars. The frst pillar, Data, is aimed at facilitating data exchange and flling gaps in analyzing the resource nexus within human–environment systems. It involves collection of new in-situ geospatial data, cataloging existing data and identifying missing information, aiding governments, businesses, and societies in tackling environmental challenges. The second pillar, Informatics, focuses on enhancing the capacity for computing and processing this nexus data. This involves the development and promotion of state-of-the-art tools and practices for data management in complex human–environment systems. The third pillar, Analytics, is centered on extracting meaningful information from data to aid in decision-making. This includes the development and promotion of advanced analytical tools and frameworks for analyzing the resource nexus.

Delving into the specifcs of the Landslides and Land Subsidence Module, we fnd a history of commitment to understanding and mitigating the impacts of land subsidence and landslides. The objectives of this module are closely aligned with the broader goals of the AID Programme, focusing on bridging the gap between science and policy and building capacities to better manage these geohazards. The module brings together a network of experts, researchers, and practitioners dedicated to developing innovative

solutions and strategies. The activities of this module are diverse and impactful. They range from conducting in-depth research and analysis to developing tools and frameworks for better decision-making. By facilitating an international network of scientists and professionals, the module enhances collaborative efforts to address the challenges posed by land subsidence and landslides, both regionally and globally.

An integral part of the module's mission is to strengthen the science-policy connection. This aspect is crucial in ensuring that the fndings and solutions developed through research are efectively translated into practical policies and actions. Additionally, the module places a strong emphasis on capacity building, recognizing the importance of empowering local communities, policymakers, and other stakeholders with the knowledge and tools to efectively address these geohazards. For those interested in exploring the Landslides and Land Subsidence Module further, a wealth of information is available online at [https://www.sustainabilityaid.net/](https://www.sustainabilityaid.net/landslidesandlandsubsidence) [landslidesandlandsubsidence](https://www.sustainabilityaid.net/landslidesandlandsubsidence) (Fig. [2](#page-4-0)).

## **5 Landslides and land subsidence AID tools**

In addressing the multifaceted challenge of ground instability, the Landslides and Land Subsidence Module emphasizes the integration of diverse resources and tools, as well as the importance of making complex data accessible to a broad audience. Central to this endeavor is the systematic presentation of key resources, software tools, and interactive platforms, each serving a distinct but interconnected role in understanding and managing ground instability issues. Moreover, we also require collaboration of expertise from diverse disciplines. However, for efective cross-disciplinary collaboration, it's crucial to have tools, data, and resources that are interpretable across diferent domains and not overly specialized. Recognizing this necessity, we have compiled information into tables that provides a comprehensive overview of the tools, data, and resources available.

Table [1](#page-5-0) presents a collection of inventories and susceptibility maps, information on historical landslides and land subsidence records, offering foundational data essential for initial risk assessment and understanding the geographical distribution of instability. This information is crucial for learning from historical events and helping us to improve predictions. Software tools, used for technical analysis of landslides and land subsidence are detailed in Table [2](#page-6-0). There are sophisticated geological and geotechnical analysis software as well as advanced earth observation technologies, to better understand the causes and dynamics of ground movements. Their application ranges from analyzing past landslide events to real-time monitoring of subsidence, crucial for proactive management and mitigation efforts.



<span id="page-4-0"></span>**Fig. 2** The Landslides and Land Subsidence Module webpage on the UNU Sustainability Nexus AID website, enabling access to **a** general information on the geological processes and **b** available AID tools

Interactive platforms for landslides and land subsidence tracking, listed in Table [3](#page-7-0), play a crucial role in making complex data accessible and interpretable to a wider audience. These platforms not only facilitate data visualization and user interaction but also promote community involvement and awareness. They serve as a bridge between technical data and its practical, on-the-ground applications, making information readily available for better understanding, decision-making, education, and outreach. Additionally, the resources highlighted in Table [4](#page-7-1) are curated to serve as an introductory to advanced information gateway for researchers venturing into the feld of landslides and subsidence from diferent domains. The goal is to provide a comprehensive knowledge base that spans basic understanding to more complex, specialized insights. Please note that the resources and tools listed in Tables [1,](#page-5-0) [2,](#page-6-0) [3](#page-7-0) and [4](#page-7-1) represent only a subset of widely used tools in this domain and do not include all available options. Moreover, the website is also dynamic, and the list of AID tools is constantly updated and expanded. The goal of this initiative is to bring together experts from diferent felds, encouraging them to share and apply tools that are well-known in one area but not in others. We invite professionals to join us in enhancing these tools, analyses, and data. This effort is crucial for building a stronger, more informed response to the challenges of landslides and subsidence.

#### **6 The way forward**

Landslides and land subsidence are currently signifcant and escalating issues, particularly in the context of worsening climate change impacts. Recognizing and quantifying the risks associated with these geohazards is critical, but it is only a part of the solution. The focus needs to shift towards making informed decisions to enhance the resilience of our people and infrastructure against these challenges. This calls for a collaborative effort involving various stakeholders, including scientists, policymakers, community leaders, and industry experts, to develop and implement effective strategies.

A nexus approach is vital in this scenario. It results in an integrated and holistic perspective, combining expertise and insights from diferent felds to address the complexities of landslides and subsidence. By embracing the collaborative approach, we can go beyond mere risk identifcation to formulate comprehensive solutions that consider environmental, social, and economic factors. The UNU Sustainability Nexus AID Programme stands out as an exemplary initiative in this direction. It underscores the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and the merging of scientifc research with policymaking. Recognizing the disproportionate impact of landslides and land subsidence on the Global South (Petley [2012\)](#page-10-15), the UNU Sustainability Nexus AID Programme prioritizes the

#### <span id="page-5-0"></span>**Table 1** Landslides and land subsidence inventories and data featured by the UNU Sustainability Nexus AID Programme as of August 2024



engagement of experts from these regions. Their frsthand experience in tackling these challenges provides invaluable insights for understanding and addressing the complexities of geohazards, aligning with the growing recognition of the importance of local and indigenous knowledge in disaster risk reduction (Kelman et al. [2012;](#page-9-20) Gaillard & Mercer [2013](#page-9-21)).

We acknowledge that universal policies are often ineffective in diverse geographical and socio-economic contexts (Blaikie et al., [2003\)](#page-8-8). Therefore, the integration of local knowledge and expertise is crucial for developing contextspecifc strategies. To this end, we are initiating international collaborations through workshops, virtual conferences, and exchange programs to facilitate knowledge sharing across

<span id="page-6-0"></span>



diverse settings. This approach aims to bridge the gap between scientifc and local knowledge, employing a system thinking approach to capture the interconnected nature of geohazard risks and their societal impacts. Simultaneously, we are developing targeted capacity-building initiatives to ensure that stakeholders at all levels—from local government officials to community leaders—are equipped to efectively utilize advanced tools for risk assessment and management. This people-centered approach (Scolobig et al. [2015\)](#page-10-18) aims to empower local communities and decisionmakers, enhancing their ability to contribute to and implement efective disaster risk reduction strategies.

The AID Programme also recognizes the complex governance challenges in disaster risk reduction (Djalante & Lassa [2019\)](#page-8-13) and the need to consider climate change

<span id="page-7-0"></span>**Table 3** Interactive landslides and land subsidence platforms featured by the UNU Sustainability Nexus AID Programme as of August 2024

Platform	Description	Link
NASA Landslide Reporter	A crowdsourcing tool for landslide data, part of the Cooperative Open Online Landslide Repository (COOLR)	(NASA Landslide Reporter 2024)
NASA Landslide Viewer	A web portal to open global landslide data from <b>NASA</b>	(NASA Landslide Viewer 2024)
European Ground Motion Service (EGMS)	Operated by ESA, provides information on ground motion across Europe, supporting geohazard mitigation and land-use planning	(Costantini et al. 2021)
Norwegian Ground Motion Service	A nationwide, freely accessible and web- based map service for InSAR-based ground deformation data in Norway	(InSAR Norway)
Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (BGR)	Offers geological mapping, monitoring groundwater resources, and studying natural hazards like landslides. Provides comprehensive research and monitoring	(BGR Geoportal 2024)
IGME Global Subsidence Information System	Visualizes and provides information on global subsidence data, crucial for assessing ground stability and risks	(Herrera-García et al. 2021b)
Harris Subsidence Map	Showcases subsidence rates in Harris, Galveston, and surrounding counties, Texas, USA. It details the annual rate of change in ellipsoidal height from GPS data (2018–2022), with period of record plots for each station	(Harris-Galveston Subsidence District 2023)
Interactive Map of Land Subsidence in Iran	Interactive map of land subsidence in Iran based on Sentinel-1 SAR data (2014-2020)	Subsmap-Iran
<b>COMET Subsidence Portal</b>	Land Subsidence Portal presenting 99 subsiding regions in Iran with InSAR time-series data	(COMET-LiCS Land Subsidence Portal)

<span id="page-7-1"></span>**Table 4** Landslides and land subsidence educational and capacity building resources featured by the UNU Sustainability Nexus AID Programme as of August 2024



impacts on geohazard risks (Birkmann et al. [2022](#page-8-19)). By fostering collaboration between experts from the Global South and international partners, we aim to develop more robust, locally relevant, and sustainable approaches to managing landslide and land subsidence risks. The future of managing landslides and land subsidence efectively lies in fostering these kinds of multi-disciplinary partnerships and knowledge exchanges, which are essential for crafting resilient and sustainable solutions in an era of changing climate.

The path forward is challenging, but with the combined power of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0) and a collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach, we can build a more resilient future. This is an invitation to all stakeholders to contribute their expertise and resources towards mitigating the impacts of landslides and land subsidence and adapting our communities and infrastructure for a changing climate and technological landscape. Through united efforts and a multidisciplinary approach, it is possible to forge a future that is resilient in the face of changing climatic conditions and technological advancements.

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