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The International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) held its 40th Anniversary Conference in October 2012. As a follow-up to the insightful presentations and discussions at the conference, it was decided to publish some of the research highlights as a special issue in this journal. Building upon IIASA's scientific foundations and agenda, this special issue has two major themes: Dealing with uncertainty in integrated analyses of human-environment systems; Social, technical and institutional transformations in response to global sustainability challenges. Several papers illustrate methodological advances in dealing with uncertainties with practical applications related to major global and regional challenges such as food security, greenhouse gas emission reductions and moving towards a green economy. Other papers illustrate a range of advances regarding multiple transformations and their versatile interconnected impacts with practical applications related to major global challenges such as growing population, greenhouse gas emission reductions and involving stakeholders in policy-making.

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