



"Future Earth - Research for Global Sustainability" Launched at Rio+20

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A new 10-year international initiative on global environmental research for sustainability was successfully launched at the Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro on June 14, and shortly afterward at a very well attended side event of the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. Future Earth (<http://www.icsu.org/future-earth>) will provide a cutting-edge platform to coordinate scientific research which is designed and produced in partnership with governments, business and, more broadly, society. The initiative is scientifically sponsored by an alliance of partners, including the International Council for Science (ICSU), the International Social Science Council (ISSC), the Belmont Forum of funding agencies, UNU, UNEP and UNESCO, with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) as observer.

Future Earth is the fruit of a series of consultations on priorities for global environmental change research conducted by partners of the Alliance. One of these, the two-year ICSU-ISSC Earth System Visioning which concluded in 2011, identified the Grand Challenges for Earth System Science for Global Sustainability and recommended a new overarching institutional structure to promote more effective interdisciplinary research. Future Earth was then approved as a new interdisciplinary body by ICSU members at their 30th General Assembly in September 2011. The initiative will build on the strengths of existing ICSU co-sponsored global environmental change programmes, their Earth System Science Partnership (ESSP), and their projects, by integrating their activities and also attracting new capacity. Three of the programmes (DIVERSITAS, the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) and the International Human Dimensions Programme (IHDP) have signaled their willingness to merge into a new single organization. The World Climate Research Programme (WCRP) will be an independent partner, supporting Future Earth strategically and intellectually.

A multi-stakeholder committee, known as the Transition Team, was appointed by the Alliance in June 2011 to work on the design of Future Earth. The team has focused on three main priorities, namely the research framework, organizational design options and outreach strategy. It will conclude its mandate at the end of 2012. In 2013, Future Earth will start operations, with an interim Governing Council setting its

strategic direction, and a Scientific Committee shaping its research agenda. By integrating across disciplines and sectors, Future Earth research will answer fundamental questions about how and why the global environment is changing; what are likely future changes; what the implications are for the wellbeing of humans and other species; what choices can be made to enhance resilience, create positive futures, and reduce harmful risks and vulnerabilities; and how this knowledge can support policy decisions and sustainable development.

Future Earth was unveiled in March 2012 at 'Planet Under Pressure', a major scientific conference organized in London by the global environmental change programmes and ICSU. To co-design the Future Earth research agenda, there will be further consultations, in 2012 and beyond, with the global environmental change research community and other stakeholders. Representatives of existing global environmental change projects will be invited to provide input on the initial draft research framework in the coming weeks, and to meet Transition Team members later in the year. An online consultation will be launched in the coming months to extend the scope of consultation and dialogue which is an integral part of Future Earth. Workshops will be held in Africa, Asia and Latin America between October and December 2012 to broaden the scope of co-design to key stakeholders in these regions.

For more information on Future Earth, please visit: www.icsu.org/future-earth