

To: Chairs of Scientific (Steering) Committees of core projects of DIVERSITAS, IGBP, IHDP, WCRP, ESSP

Chairs of National Committees

cc: Chairs and Executive Directors of DIVERSITAS, IGBP, IHDP, WCRP, ESSP
Executive Officers of core projects

27 July 2012

Object: information on the development of the “Future Earth – research for global sustainability” initiative

Dear Colleagues

We are pleased to announce that Future Earth, a new global research platform, was launched at the recent Science, Technology and Innovation Forum held in Rio de Janeiro, just ahead of the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. The need for Future Earth was reinforced during several events held at Rio+20 itself, by the highest levels of government, business and civil society groups.

Future Earth is being developed on behalf of a new Science and Technology Alliance for Global Sustainability. The Alliance, which co-sponsors Future Earth, brings together the International Council for Science (ICSU), the International Social Science Council (ISSC), the Belmont Forum of international environmental research funders, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations University (UNU) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) as an observer.

Future Earth will deliver solution-orientated research for sustainability, emphasising the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, co-designing research with its beneficiaries, improving the science-policy interface, building capacity in developing countries and engaging a new generation of scientists in global change research. It will build on the success of the international global environmental change (GEC) programmes (Diversitas, International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme, International Human Dimensions Programme, World Climate Research Programme, and their Earth System Science Partnership), in time, engaging all the existing projects of these programmes, whilst supporting an extended international research community to co-design and develop new, trans-disciplinary research.

Future Earth is being designed by an international team of scientific experts from across the natural and social science disciplines, sponsors and executives, under the leadership of Professors Johan Rockström and Diana Liverman. The work of this ‘Transition Team’ is focussed on delivering a research framework, institutional design and stakeholder engagement strategy. The research framework, which sets out the conceptual framework for Future Earth research and a set of draft integrated research themes, will be published for consultation in the second half of 2012. This takes account of the many constructive contributions that have been provided by GEC projects following a letter in February this year.

Consultation activities in the coming six months include a written consultation with GEC projects on the draft research framework (expected in the coming weeks); a meeting with representatives of all programmes and projects (date to be confirmed); a set of regional consultations; and, an on-line consultation open to the whole community, reaching out also to policy-makers, businesses, and NGOs. You will soon receive further information on these consultations.

Whilst Future Earth is in its design phase, early contributions to the new initiative have already started. These include the recently announced Belmont Forum International Opportunities Fund (<http://www.igfagcr.org/iof-home-page>) and the ISSC's Climate Change Design Project (http://www.worldsocialscience.org/?page_id=2281).

The Transition Team will make its recommendations by the end of 2012 or shortly after, and we intend to establish the Future Earth Science Committee thereafter, to provide on-going scientific leadership. By mid-2014, we expect the Future Earth secretariat to be in place, and the programme to be fully operational.

A Transition Management Project, reporting to the Alliance, is being established to manage this transition process and ensure a fully operational Future Earth initiative in 2014. This management project will be overseen by a Project Board, co-chaired by Steven Wilson (Executive Director of ICSU) and Jakob Rhyner (Vice-Rector, UN University) and will cover work streams such as funding, communications and outreach, governance arrangements, etc. The Board will include membership from both the Alliance and the existing GEC research community (programme, project and committee level). Whilst the Board will be small, we ask that the GEC programmes, projects and science committees are fully engaged in its work streams.

Further detailed information about the activities and processes described above will be available at <http://www.icsu.org/future-earth/>. We look forward to engaging you in the development of Future Earth, and to working closely with you on the success of this important new initiative.

Yours sincerely,



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