

Short summary of the Future Earth GEC Community Workshop

28 - 29 November 2012

UNESCO, Paris

Workshop objectives

The workshop objective was to seek feedback and involvement from the Global Environmental Change (GEC) community on i) Future Earth's revised research framework; ii) Future Earth's organizational design; and iii) a time-line and practical arrangements for the transition to a fully operational Future Earth programme. The results of the workshop will be used by the Future Earth leadership (the Transition Team¹, the Implementation Management Board² and the Future Earth Scientific Committee, when appointed³) in order to finalise the overall Future Earth framework and design, while guiding its implementation.

Research Framework

The participants of the workshop discussed how the Future Earth draft research framework could be further improved and populated. There was a general consensus on the document, whose thematic structure was found to be a considerable improvement compared to the previously proposed structure of eight themes which the GEC community had commented on. Participants expressed the need to better articulate the difference between theme two ("Global development") and theme three ("Transformations towards sustainability"), and to more comprehensively address certain research areas, including for example: evolutionary genetics; biodiversity; health; vulnerability; ocean acidification; the links between land use change, agriculture, the food systems and biodiversity; environmental impact of chemicals; and social tipping points. Participants called for a bottom-up approach in order to populate this broad framework, possibly through a clustering of existing activities in order to move towards more integration.

Additionally, it was mentioned that the framework should even more emphasise the contribution of the social sciences, and also include research questions on methodology. Transition Team representatives supported the position that strong disciplinary research should be an important part of Future Earth, as it provides the fundamental base for interdisciplinary research. It was stressed that the terminology (e.g. "transdisciplinarity") may be interpreted in different ways by different communities, and thus needs to be clarified. Cross-cutting capabilities would also need more clarification. Finally, participants agreed that a stronger involvement of stakeholders outside the scientific community is necessary to frame the key questions in a full co-design mode.

Organisational design

Participants stressed the need for Future Earth to have a flexible and nimble structure. It was argued that innovation within Future Earth will come from the project level, which in the currently proposed

¹ The committee responsible for the initial design of Future Earth until December 2012. See list at <http://www.icsu.org/future-earth/who/transition-team>.

² The committee overseeing the transition to a fully operational Future Earth starting in 2013.

³ The nomination process was open in January 2013.

governance structure do not seem to be effectively linked to the top-level structure. Each project should be able to find a place and new initiatives should also emerge where needed. The idea to develop informal and temporary clusters of projects to promote integration received strong support. These clusters would provide inputs to key interdisciplinary research questions, relating to one or several themes. Research themes would thus provide broad areas for integration, without representing structural units of the governance, therefore separate secretariats for the three research themes might neither be necessary nor useful. Participants argued that research questions should not be over-prescribed: focussing on the mechanisms to involve projects into activities will help generate more specific research questions. Future Earth should be a platform for cooperation, facilitating workshops and other meeting places where projects can learn from each other and where new cooperations and initiatives can be established.

The issues of scale and co-design were found to be linked in an important way. Participants stated that stakeholders are interested in the local and regional level, while the documents drafted by the Transition Team still seemed more linked to the global scale – which would limit the effective co-design of research agendas. It was also stressed that co-design would need to be a priority at all times, not just at early stages of Future Earth.

With regard to the selection of the Science Committee members, participants mentioned the need for a broad nomination process. They also suggested that some members of the Science Committee need to have a track record of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research. Participants proposed the establishment of an Executive Committee, as a subset of the Governing Council, for faster decision-making. Further, Future Earth would need to be evaluated after a period of approximately three years in order to identify which aspects function well and which do not.

Participants also remarked that Future Earth needs to be described with more consistency, in terms of terminology (programme, initiative, etc.) and of what it will deliver (produce research, fund research, coordinate research, etc.).

Funding strategy

The key funding challenges for Future Earth are: 1) the unprecedented scale of the project, 2) the fragmentation of the current funding landscape, and 3) the transition from diverse ways of funding developed by the GEC programmes to a united strategy for Future Earth.

The International Opportunity Fund (IOF), a flexible tool of the Belmont Forum that distributes funds through Collaborative Research Actions (CRA), can provide funding support for some Future Earth's activities. Priorities for 2013 are currently under scoping, and Future Earth will be a significant source of input for future calls. However, it was agreed that the Belmont Forum represents a rather small share of current GEC research funds, and it is necessary to expand the Future Earth funding, for example within national funding systems, moving beyond the traditional funding ministries. Additionally, Future Earth should reach out to potential partners in the private sector and philanthropic organizations. Moreover, Future Earth could consider setting up a trust fund.

The Implementation Management Board will make an inventory of the current funding sources of the GEC Programmes and these funders will be approached with the request to transition funding to Future Earth. The necessity to maintain the “human face” and long relationship of current funding arrangements

was emphasized; strong centralization of funding might hinder this. Adding another layer to the complex funding structure should be avoided.

Defining endorsement mechanisms under Future Earth (having the “brand” Future Earth attached to a given project) could also help attract additional funding available for the projects, for example from private funders. This is what one of the participants called: “going shopping with Future Earth”. There is a need for clear strategy for communication towards funders: it was proposed to prepare a short (1-2 page) clear strategy document for projects and funders.

Transition process

The discussions on the transition towards Future Earth from the perspective of the GEC projects were very diverse, mirroring the diversity of projects. Consensus was expressed on the need for projects to receive a formal invitation from the Alliance to become part of Future Earth, early in 2013, and to ensure that the transition into Future Earth be as much bottom-up as possible. The meeting provided a great opportunity for representatives from across the full landscape of GEC projects to meet each other and discuss potential cooperation and synergies. The idea of a wider scientific meeting was strongly supported to engage projects more concretely into Future Earth. More broadly, workshops and conferences could bring together the scientific communities of the four GEC Programmes and their projects to identify opportunities for integration.

The transition should be a step-wise process spanning over 2 to 3 years. The projects recognised the need to evolve to meet the science goals of Future Earth. However, uncertainties about the transition process may hamper this transition. Projects stated the importance of ensuring stable funding in the mid-term (i.e. until end 2014), both for offices and for SSCs and activities. They also requested more clarity on the logistics of the transition process (timeframe, organisation, leadership and transfer of responsibilities, and resources available) and opportunities to develop a common understanding of the research landscape on GEC and explore synergies and opportunities for collaboration across projects. Core projects will be also invited to develop a short roadmap specifying where they see themselves fitting in the Future Earth framework and how they will evolve into Future Earth.

Community engagement

Participants discussed what it would take to grow the research and stakeholder communities working on GEC/Future Earth research, and how this could be organised. Future Earth should build on the already existing networks of the GEC projects but also integrate additional communities, e.g. the mainstream social sciences. There is a need to define more clearly the function of Future Earth for the wider research community. Building a community on inter- and transdisciplinary research will also require adequate funding.

Some participants requested clarification on the role of the Engagement Committee, and on its relation with the Science Committee and the Governing Council. The Engagement Committee should create criteria and guidelines for co-design, facilitate co-design, co-production and co-dissemination of research, and oversee the implementation of co-design at the various levels of Future Earth.

Additional discussion addressed form and function of regional nodes in the design of Future Earth. The regional nodes will be critical for linking research communities, funding bodies and other

stakeholders from the local level to the global framework of Future Earth. Regional nodes need to be of different design, depending on the research community and structure already in place in the region.

Communication

A group of participant attended an optional breakout session on communications. There is a need for a communications strategy which goes beyond the current practices of the GEC programmes towards more engagement with stakeholders of the research and is grounded in a comprehensive stakeholder analysis. It should cover both external communications and internal communications. Good internal communications, which require a new approach that combines a culture of sharing and collaboration with the appropriate technology, is essential for effective external communications. The “Hurricane Model” of external communications was introduced. This is a web-based, interactive, demand-driven model of knowledge sharing that relies on stakeholders to drive a dynamic communications function. Participants of the break-out session on communications expressed willingness to contribute to further work, and possibly a workshop on these challenges.

Data management

A group of participant attended another optional breakout session on data management. Data from Future Earth’s research must be preserved and made available both during and after the life of the initiative. The preservation and accessibility of high-quality data resulting from Future Earth activities is critical to its success. However, a fully centralized approach to data management was not recommended as data centres already exist. It was recommended that the Science Committee include a “data champion” supported by an expert data subcommittee, and that the Secretariat includes a full-time data coordinator. Existing OECD and GEOSS data policies are a good starting point for a Future Earth data policy, and there is a potential for cooperation.

Participants noted the need to do research on the way in which different epistemologies that underlie data collection within the social and natural sciences, can be integrated. In fact, it was suggested that 'data management' might not be the appropriate technical term as social scientists often refer to ‘information’ instead of ‘data’.

It was emphasised that data management is not only a technical problem but also a social issue. Future Earth should provide both resources and motivation to ensure quality data management across its activities, and monitor progress. The creation of a Future Earth document addressing data management was recommended. The members of the breakout group on data management expressed their willingness to work with CODATA and WDS to provide advice on data issues during the transition period.

Presentations of the meeting are available at:

<http://www.icsu.org/future-earth/whats-new/events/gec-project-workshop>

Further inputs for both the Transition Team and Implementation Management Board are invited on info@future-earth-research.org

Annex 1: participant list

Javier ARISTEGUI

IMBER / SSC member
Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria,
Spain
jaristegui@dbio.ulpgc.es

Bernard AVRIL

IMBER / Executive Officer
IMR, Bergen, Norway
avrilb@imr.no

Jenny BAESEMAN

CLIC / Director
Norwegian Polar Institute, Norway
jbaeseman@gmail.com

Xuemei BAI

IHDP / SC Vice-Chair
Australian National University, Australia
xuemei.bai@anu.edu.au

Roger BARRY

CLIVAR / Director
National Oceanography Centre, UK
rogbar@noc.ac.uk

Anik BHADURI

GWSP / Executive Officer
GWSP IPO, Bonn, Germany
abhaduri@uni-bonn.de

Frank BIERMANN

ESG / Chair
VU University, The Netherlands
frank.biermann@vu.nl

Sandrine BONY

WGCM / co-Chair
LMD/IPSL, Jussieu, France
bony@lmd.jussieu.fr

Christopher BOONE

UGEC / SSC member
Arizona State University, US
cgboone@asu.edu

Salvano BRICENO

IRDR
Divonne-les-Bains, France
salvanob@gmail.com

Eduardo S. BRONDIZIO

IGBP / SC member
Indiana University (US)/IHEAL-Sorbonne-
Nouvelle-Paris3 (France)
ebrondiz@indiana.edu

John BROOME

CODATA / Officer-Treasurer
Natural Resources Canada (NRCAN)
broome@nrcan.gc.ca

Lijbert BRUSSAARD

agroBIODIVERSITY / co-Chair
Wageningen University, The Netherlands
lijbert.brussaard@wur.nl

Bradley J. CARDINALE

FreshwaterBIODIVERSITY / SC member
University of Michigan, US
bradcard@umich.edu

Kathleen CASS

CODATA / Executive Director
CODATA
codata@dial.oleane.com

Ilan CHABAY

IHDP / SC member; KLSC / Chair
Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies
Potsdam, Germany
ilan.chabay@gmail.com

Marie-Lise CHANIN

SPARC / ex co-Chair and Director
IPSL/LATMOS, France
marie-lise.chanin@latmos.ipsl.fr

Peter COX

AIMES / co-Chair
University of Exeter, UK
p.m.cox@exeter.ac.uk

Wolfgang CRAMER

ecoSERVICES / Co-Chair
IMBE, Mediterranean Institute for
Biodiversity and Ecology, France
wolfgang.cramer@imbe.fr

John DEARING

PAGES / SSC member
University of Southampton, UK
j.dearing@soton.ac.uk

Ellenor DEVINE

Swedish National Committee / Coordinator
The Swedish Secretariat for Environmental
Earth System Sciences (SSEESS)
ellenor.devine@sseess.kva.se

Michael DONOGHUE

bioGENESIS / SC member;
US National Committee DIVERSITAS
Yale University, US
michael.donoghue@yale.edu

Anantha DURAIAPPAH

IHDP / Executive Director
UNU, Bonn
duraiappah@ihdp.unu.edu

Giovana ESPINDOLA

GLP / Executive Officer; IGBP Brazil
INPE, Brazil
giovana@dpi.inpe.br

Daniel P. FAITH

bioGENESIS / co-Lead
Australian Museum
danfaith9@yahoo.com.au

Markus FISCHER

DIVERSITAS Swiss Committee / President

Swiss Forum Biodiversity
markus.fischer@ips.unibe.ch

Hubertus FISCHER

PAGES / Co-Chair
University of Bern, Switzerland
hubertus.fischer@climate.unibe.ch

Corrie GRIFFITH

UGEC / Executive Director
Arizona State University, US
corrie.griffith@asu.edu

David GRIGGS

WCRP / JSC member
Monash Sustainability Institute, Australia
dave.griggs@monash.edu

Sarah GRIMES

GEOWOW Project Manager; IOC
UNESCO, France
s.grimes@unesco.org

Thomas GROSS

GOOS / Programme Coordinator; IOC
UNESCO, France
t.gross@unesco.org

Heinz GUTSCHER

IHDP / SC member
University of Zurich, Switzerland
heinz.gutscher@uzh.ch

Heide HACKMANN

ISSC / Executive Director
ISSC, France
hh.issc@gmail.com

Hans-Christen HANSSON

iLEAPS / SSC, co-chair 2013
Stockholm University, Sweden
hc@itm.su.se

David HIK

IASC / President; IPI / co-Chair

University of Alberta, Canada
dhik@ualberta.ca

John INGRAM

GECAFS / Food Security Leader
NERC, Natural Environment Research
Council, UK
john.ingram@eci.ox.ac.uk

Christian KÖRNER

GMBA / Chair
University of Basel, Switzerland
ch.koerner@unibas.ch

Sari KOVATS

GECHH / SSC member
London School of Hygiene and Tropical
Medicine, UK
sari.kovats@lshtm.ac.uk

Hartwig KREMER

LOICZ / Chief Executive Officer
Institute of Coastal Research, Germany
Helmholtz-Zentrum Geesthacht, Centre for
Materials and Coastal Research
hartwig.kremer@loicz.org

Cornelia KRUG

bioDISCOVERY / Science Officer
DIVERSITAS, France
cornelia@diversitas-international.org

Christiane LANCELOT

IGBP / SC member
Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium
lancelot@ulb.ac.be

Anne LARIGAUDERIE

DIVERSITAS / Executive Director
DIVERSITAS, France
anne@diversitas-international.org

Philippe LE PRESTRE

DIVERSITAS / SC member
Université Laval (Quebec)
philippe.le-prestre@pol.ulaval.ca

Paul LEADLEY

bioDISCOVERY / Chair
Université Paris-Sud, France
paul.leadley@u-psud.fr

Rik LEEMANS

Transition Team / Member
Wageningen University, The Netherlands
rik.leemans@WUR.NL

Peter LISS

Transition Team / Member
University of East Anglia, UK
p.liss@uea.ac.uk

Diana LIVERMAN

Transition Team / Co-Chair
University of Arizona, US
liverman@u.arizona.edu

Remi LOSNO

SOLAS / French Representative
University Paris 7 Denis Diderot, France
remi.losno@univ-paris-diderot.fr

Georgina MACE

DIVERSITAS / Chair
Imperial College London, UK
g.mace@ucl.ac.uk

Alexia MASSACAND

GEO / Senior Coordinator
Group on Earth observations (GEO)
amassacand@geosec.org

Mustapha MOKRANE

WDS / Executive Director
WDS, Japan
mustapha.mokrane@icsu-wds.org

Patrick MONFRAY

Belmont Forum / co-Chair
ANR, France
patrick.monfray@agencerecherche.fr

Paul S. MONKS

IGAC / co-Chair
University of Leicester, UK
psm7@le.ac.uk

Elena NIKITINA

IHDP / SC Vice-Chair
EcoPolicy Research, Russia
elenanikitina@bk.ru

Albert NORSTRÖM

PECS / Coordinator
Stockholm Resilience Centre, Sweden
albert.norstrom@stockholmresilience.su.se

Claudia PAHL-WOSTL

GWSP / co-Chair
University of Osnabrück, Germany
cpahlwos@uni-osnabrueck.de

Anne-Hélène PRIEUR-RICHARD

ecoHEALTH / Science Officer
DIVERSITAS, France
anne-helene@diversitas-international.org

Ramesh RAMACHANDRAN

LOICZ / Chair
National Centre for Sustainable Coastal
Management, Government of India
rramesh_au@yahoo.com

Jakob RHYNER

UNU / Vice-Rector in Europe
UNU, Bonn
rhyner@vie.unu.edu

Johan ROCKSTROM

Transition Team / co-Chair
Stockholm Resilience Centre, Sweden
johan.rockstrom@stockholmresilience.su.se

Mark ROSENBERG

GECCH / co-Chair
Queen's University, Canada
mark.rosenberg@queensu.ca

Thomas ROSSWALL

CCAFS / Chair
Le Tigtetnet, France
thomas.rosswall@gmail.com

Karen C. SETO

UGEC / co-Chair
Yale University, US
karen.seto@yale.edu

Karen SMYTH

IGPB / Science-Policy Manager
IGBP, Stockholm
karen.smyth@igbp.kva.se

Eva SPEHN

GMBA / Science Officer; Swiss National
Committee
Institute of Botany, Basel, Switzerland
Eva.Spehn@unibas.ch

Tanja SUNI

iLEAPS / Executive Officer
University of Helsinki, Finland
tanja.suni@helsinki.fi

Sandra van der HEL

ESG / Fellow
VU University, The Netherlands
s.c.vander.hel@student.vu.nl

Sander van der LEEUW

iHOPE / co-Chair
Arizona State University, US
vanderle@asu.edu

Peter J. van OEVELEN

GEWEX / Director
International GEWEX Project Office, US
gewex@gewex.org

Peter VERBURG

GLP / Chair
VU University, The Netherlands
Peter.Verborg@vu.nl

Charles VÖRÖSMARTY

GWSP / co-Chair
The City College of New York, US
cvorosmarty@ccny.cuny.edu;
crossroads@ccny.cuny.edu

Steven WILSON

ICSU / Executive Director

ICSU, Paris

steven.wilson@icsu.org

Ruben ZONDERVAN

ESG / Executive Director
Lund University, Sweden
ruben.zondervan@esg.lu.se

Alliance Secretariats

Peter BATES

ICSU
peter.bates@icsu.org

Maureen BRENNAN

ICSU
maureen.brennan@icsu.org

Gisbert GLASER

ICSU
gisbert.glaser@icsu.org

Jessica JOHMANN

UNU
johmann@vie.unu.edu

Orla MARTIN

ISSC
om.issc@gmail.com

Johannes MENGLES

ICSU
johannes.mengles@icsu.org

Howard MOORE

ICSU
howard.moore@icsu.org

Roberta QUADRELLI

ICSU
Roberta.quadrelli@icsu.org

Carthage SMITH

ICSU
carthage.smith@icsu.org

Anne-Sophie STEVANCE

ICSU
anne-sophie.stevance@icsu.org

Denise YOUNG

ICSU
denise.young@icsu.org