



FUTUREARTH



F U T U R E A R T H

Regional Workshop for Latin America and the Caribbean

Rapporteur's Report

The goals of the meeting

- The world is facing a set of very large and complex problems. So the scale of the scientific effort needed to understand and solve these problems has also increased.
- A number of large-scale global research programmes have been developed over the last three decades, including the World Climate Research Programme, the International Geosphere-Biosphere programme, Diversitas and the International Human Dimensions Programme.
- Future Earth is the latest development in this trend. It is a new science and technology alliance for global sustainability. Partners include the Belmont Forum, the UN University, UNESCO, the International Group of Funding Agencies for Global Change Research, UNEP, the WMO (as an observer), and the International Social Science Council as well as ICSU.
- The Alliance have set up a 'transition team' to do the basic design of Future Earth.
- The goals of this meeting are to (a) explain progress to date, (b) hear about regional priorities, (c) see how to work together in future (d) explore the best way to establish a regional interface for future earth.

Why Future Earth?

The perceived risk that the pace and scale of change is now so great that we could exceed the safe operating space for human social and economic systems, possibly triggering a major irreversible shift in some part of the global ecosystem.

Global challenges

- The world's population appears unlikely to stabilize below 9 billion. Will we be able to supply enough food, water, energy and other resources for all these people without causing major environmental damage?
- How will we adapt to living in a warmer world? What are the implications for human settlements and agriculture, if areas are lost to rising seas, or become more arid, or are at more risk of extreme weather events?
- As humanity is now predominantly an urban species, can we learn how to manage cities more efficiently?
- What are the implications for governance? Can we get better at taking long-term risks into account?
- What are the risks? Where are the new opportunities likely to be? What should be our priorities?

The purpose of the meeting

- To get LAC regional feedback on the Future Earth concept.
- To identify links with existing regional research plans, priorities and organizations.
- To get guidance on the next steps to implement Future Earth in Latin America and the Caribbean.

General reaction

- Most people broadly welcomed the FE concept, but there was some concern/uncertainty about what it would mean in practice.
- In particular, there was a sense that FE had to add value to LAC, not compete for existing resources, and not set up parallel structures and duplicate offices.
- So the way forward is to identify where both FE and LAC can add value and derive benefits from working together.
- A number of people also emphasized that LAC is very large and very socially, economically and ecologically diverse, which means that a single LAC program might be not work; might need a suite of programs for different LAC sub-regions.

Opportunities

- Phase 1:
- Start by looking at successful projects in LAC; where there is existing momentum and centres of expertise (such as biodiversity, biofuels, natural disasters, utilizing indigenous knowledge etc.)
- Identify which of those fit into the provisional set of FE priorities.
- Look for value-added in both directions; where projects in LAC can contribute to FE goals, and where FE can augment projects in LAC by adding e.g. international cooperation and dissemination.
- Link those projects under FE.
- Phase 2:
- Identify other projects that can then be brought into FE.

What we should not do

- Don't duplicate effort. Don't create a set of parallel structures.
- Don't replicate the mistakes of the past. Identify what has worked, what has not worked.
- Don't think that adding more stakeholders will automatically lead to better projects. It is usually better to have a small, effective group rather than a large, ineffective group, so use 'flexible geometry', i.e. temporary coalitions around particular projects.
- Don't make 'capacity building' a end in itself. Capacity building is the result of good projects.
- Don't assume that 'big science' is the only way to solve big problems, for two reasons:
 1. Many great innovations originated in small teams, or with individuals.
 2. There are many local innovations with the potential to be replicated on a much larger scale.

Where FE can add value

- LAC has areas of strong scientific capacity. However, regional networks tend to be weak, there are few working partnerships between e.g. universities and the private sector, not many examples of policy-relevant scientific research, the level of public understanding of science is low, there are problems with access to funding and data.
- If FE can help to solve these problems, that would greatly enhance LAC capacity.
- How can FE do this? By:
- Strengthening and augmenting the most effective of the existing networks.
- Linking to the most successful relevant projects.
- Particular support (including directing funding) for programs that are interdisciplinary and collaborative, include outreach and steps to improve the public understanding of science, and make data more widely available.

What we should do: Work with people.

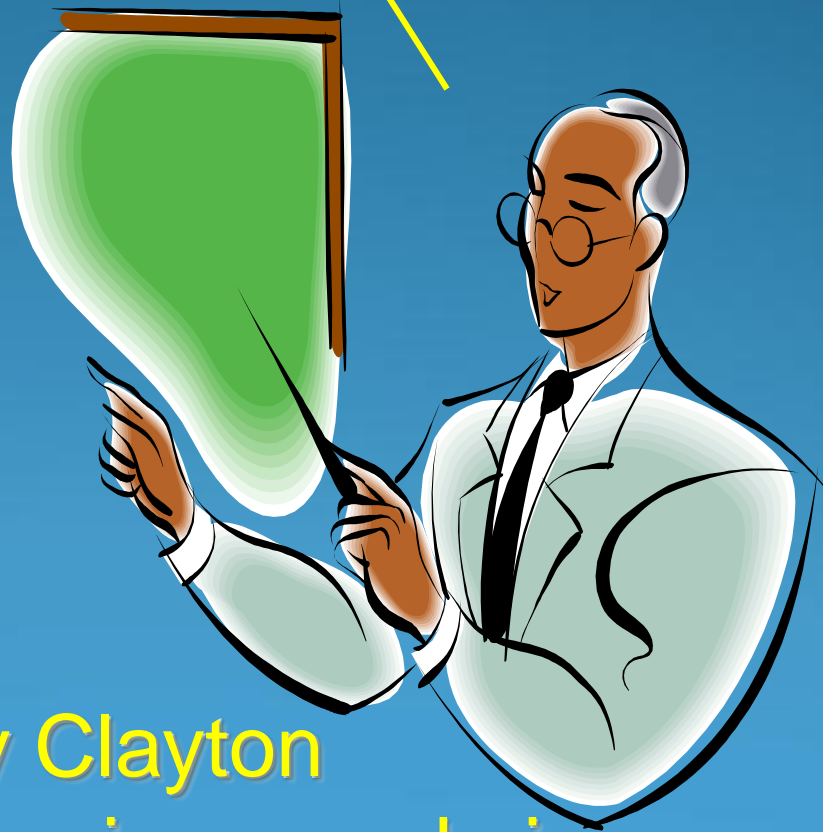
- Be solution-oriented. Must give people credible options. Help communities and countries to find ways to improve their quality of life, reduce risk, increase resilience.
- Work with people. Co-define the problem, and the solution. Don't come with preconceptions as to what the problems are, and what the solutions are. Encourage local approaches and bottom-up solutions. Don't treat stakeholders as passive recipients – if they are genuine stakeholders, they have useful insights.
- If solutions involve changing human behaviour, then start by developing a better understanding of human motivation and behaviour. Don't just say 'we must involve the social sciences' – actually use the insights from social science.
- Social scientists also have to become more solution-oriented. Some areas of social science have a reputation for contributing abstract theory and criticism, rather than solutions. Need to become more pragmatic, and more involved.

What we should do:

Use incentives and indicators.

- Change the success criteria for scientists – reward not just for good papers, but for involvement in projects that actually solve problems and improve lives. FE can help with this by giving these projects an endorsement.
- FE can then help the lessons from these projects to be much more widely known, disseminated and replicated by publicizing them through the FE networks, and linking similar projects in different parts of the world.
- Be clear about goals. Use indicators, and track them. Be willing to change tactics if the program is not working.

Thank you !



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