

Future Earth: New global platform for sustainability research launched at Rio+20

A new 10-year international initiative to deliver solution oriented research for sustainability in partnership with society

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (14 June) — An alliance of international partners from global science, research funding and UN bodies, launched a bold new 10-year initiative on global environmental change research for sustainability at the [Forum on Science and Technology and Innovation for Sustainable Development](#) on Thursday. [Future Earth – research for global sustainability](#), will provide a cutting-edge platform to coordinate scientific research which is designed and produced in partnership with governments, business and, more broadly, society.

“We need a new approach to address the critical challenges of global environmental change and sustainable development which is more interdisciplinary, more international, more collaborative and more responsive to the users of research”, said Prof. Diana Liverman, co-Director of the Institute of the Environment at the University of Arizona and co-Chair of the Future Earth design team. Future Earth will bring together natural scientists, social scientists, engineers and the humanities with funders and policy makers to align research agendas, understand and anticipate environmental change, and develop innovative solutions.

The initiative will embody an inter- and trans-disciplinary approach to provide early warning signals of environmental risk and change, and stimulate new research to support the transition of societies towards sustainability. At the simplest level Future Earth must 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 to reduce harmful risks and vulnerabilities, and how this knowledge can support decisions and sustainable development. Future Earth will have a new global governance body and secretariat, building on the strengths of the existing core global environmental change programme, which are co-sponsored by ICSU and other members of the Alliance.

A series of consultations on how to frame the research questions will engage researchers, policy makers and practitioners, starting in the coming months. These initial consultations will involve an online survey and regional workshops in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Middle East, beginning in the second half of 2012. “We are very excited that Future Earth has made regional consultations a priority of its initial design phase”, said Tanya Abrahamse, CEO of the South African Biodiversity Research Institute and member of the Transition Team.

“Future Earth will make the vital link between the global and regional levels by scaling up international collaboration on research to inform solutions and transformations towards sustainability” added Carlos Henrique de Brito Cruz, Scientific Director of the Sao Paulo Research Foundation and Brazilian representative of the Belmont Forum of environmental research funding agencies, which is a member of the alliance establishing Future Earth. “One of the keys to the success of Future Earth will be transnational funding to support international research projects. For example, the funding agencies of the Belmont Forum have established joint calls that will bring together new international partnerships of social and natural scientists working on specific themes, such as freshwater security and coastal vulnerability.”

This interdisciplinary initiative is jointly established and scientifically sponsored by an alliance that includes the International Council for Science (ICSU), the International Social Science Council (ISSC), the Belmont Forum, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations University (UNU), and strongly supported by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

“Through its broad and strong partnership, Future Earth will connect scientific research, policy development and action, and enhance the interface between science and policy to support sustainability”, said Prof. Yuan T Lee, winner of the 1986 Nobel Prize in Chemistry and ICSU President. Lee added that “we are delighted to launch the initiative here, as Rio+20 is all about pathways for a sustainable future, and Future Earth will represent one concrete step towards it.”

For more information on Future Earth, see: <http://www.icsu.org/future-earth/>

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About ICSU

Founded in 1931, ICSU is a non-governmental organization with a global membership of national scientific bodies (121 Members, representing 141 countries) and International Scientific Unions (30 Members). The Council is frequently called upon to speak on behalf of the global scientific community and to act as an advisor in matters ranging from the environment to conduct in science. ICSU's activities focus on three areas: planning and coordinating research; science for policy; and strengthening the Universality of Science.