



ESSP Transitions into 'Future Earth'

On 31st December 2012, the Earth System Science Partnership (ESSP) will close and transition into 'Future Earth' as it develops over the next few years. During this period, the GEC research programmes (DIVERSITAS: an international programme of biodiversity science, IGBP: International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme, IHDP: International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change, and WCRP: World Climate Research Programme) will continue close collaboration with each other. 'Future Earth' is currently being planned as a ten-year international research initiative for global sustainability (www.icsu.org/future-earth) that will build on decades of scientific excellence of the four GEC research programmes and their scientific partnership, the ESSP.

Considerable ESSP scientific accomplishments include the design and implementation of an annual carbon budget trends and analysis; a digital global water atlas; a global analysis on human water security and biodiversity conservation; the establishment of a joint project on global environmental change and human health; and an innovative food systems conceptual framework. One of the lasting legacies of the ESSP Joint Project on Global Environmental Change and Food Systems (GECAFS) has been the creation of a 10-year Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) collaborative research program with the ESSP on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS). Understanding regional environmental change and its implications for local sustainability have been a critical area for the ESSP, as illustrated by the establishment of the Monsoon Asia Integrated Regional Study (MAIRS), the Global Carbon Project's Regional Carbon Cycle Assessment and Processes (RECCAP) and GECAFS' regional science plans in the Caribbean, Indo-Gangetic Plain and Southern Africa. Another major achievement of ESSP - as a scientific partnership of the four GEC research programmes - is that it helped enable collaboration among DIVERSITAS, IGBP, IHDP and WCRP.

The ESSP has also nurtured a progressive outreach portfolio. For instance, the ESSP and the sponsor programmes (DIVERSITAS, IGBP, IHDP and WCRP) contribute to an annual research dialogue with the Parties at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA). This on-going

dialogue provides the research community with an opportunity to provide regular science updates to major science-policy processes. Another example of ESSP contributions to science-policy practice is the ESSP led scientific review of UNEP's Global Environmental Outlook-5. The ESSP also pioneered a peer-reviewed journal, Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability (COSUST). This journal is open access for developing countries and is fast becoming a community platform for timely synthesis and review papers. COSUST will continue to be published by Elsevier, with contributions from the GEC research programmes and projects and then 'Future Earth' as it becomes operational.

Ensuring there is no discontinuity during the transition phase into 'Future Earth', the four sponsor programmes (DIVERSITAS, IGBP, IHDP and WCRP) will continue to stimulate the ESSP Joint Projects (the Global Carbon Project (GCP), Global Environmental Change and Human Health (GECHH) and the Global Water System Project (GWSP)) and the Monsoon Asia Integrated Regional Study (MAIRS) as integrative, interdisciplinary, cross-cutting research activities, based on the knowledge and insights for each of the programmes, and relevant for each programme and beyond. Each programme will therefore take responsibility for one or more of the JPs/IRSs with effect from 1st January 2013, on behalf of all four programmes. IGBP will foster GCP, DIVERSITAS the GWSP, IHDP the GECHH, and WCRP will foster MAIRS. ESSP will be represented by ICSU on CCAFS' Independent Science Panel. These projects and activities will therefore continue to be part of the four sponsor programmes and DIVERSITAS, IGBP, IHDP and WCRP will continue to collaborate with each other until 'Future Earth' becomes operational.

More information about Future Earth: website (www.icsu.org/future-earth) or email (info@future-earth-research.org).