



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE  
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE



**ICSU**

International Council for Science



STRENGTHENING  
INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE  
FOR THE BENEFIT  
OF SOCIETY.

# INTRODUCTION

The **INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE** (ICSU) is a global non-governmental scientific organisation with a membership of national scientific bodies (121 members, representing 141 countries) and International Scientific Unions (31 members). Its membership is a unique combination of national multidisciplinary and international disciplinary organisations.

The Council mobilises knowledge and resources of the international scientific community to strengthen international science for the benefit of society. Its strategy focuses on three main themes: International Research Collaboration; Science for Policy; and Universality of Science.

The long-term vision is for a world where excellence in science is effectively translated into policy-making and socio-economic development. In such a world, universal and equitable access to scientific data and information is a reality and all countries have the scientific capacity to use these and to contribute to generating the new knowledge that is necessary to establish their own development pathways in a sustainable manner.

The Council's global headquarters is in Paris, France, with three Regional Offices—in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific. These Offices work to engage the scientific academies, scientists and stakeholders in these regions in the Council's activities, to facilitate the engagement of communities from the developing and less-developed countries. The International Council for Science also runs focussed events in the Middle East and North Africa, Europe and North America.

# INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH COLLABORATION

To facilitate international collaboration in research, the Council convenes groups of scientists and stakeholders to agree strategic research agendas in areas of societal need. These groups then, working with large networks of scientists, plan and implement the required research. The Council-sponsored programmes operate where there is a clear benefit to be derived from an international approach. Many of the Council's programmes have operated in the area of environmental change. From this very strong foundation, they are expanding into new fields. Areas of focus include sustainability (Future Earth), disaster risk reduction (Integrated Research on Disaster Risk, IRDR) and urban health and wellbeing (Health and Wellbeing in the Changing Urban Environment). The Council often works with co-sponsor partners who help their communities engage in research programmes. For example, Future Earth is co-sponsored with the members of the Science and Technology Alliance for Global Sustainability, IRDR is co-sponsored with the International Social Science Council and the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, and the Urban Health programme is co-sponsored with the Inter Academy Medical Panel and United Nations University.

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## FUTURE EARTH

is ICSU's flagship research initiative on global environmental change and sustainability. Launched in 2012 at Rio+20, Future Earth will mobilize thousands of scientists to provide critical knowledge required to face the challenges of global environmental change and to support transformations towards global sustainability. Future Earth will integrate different disciplines from



the natural and social sciences and will strengthen partnerships with policy-makers, business and civil society to co-design solutions-oriented research for sustainability, linking environmental change and development challenges to satisfy human needs for food, water, energy and health. Future Earth is sponsored by the International Council for Science together with the International Social Science Council (ISSC), the Belmont Forum/IGFA and several UN bodies. It will build upon and integrate the existing environmental change programmes co-sponsored by ICSU—the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP), International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP), International Human Dimensions Programme (IHDP) and DIVERSITAS—biodiversity science. Research undertaken under Future Earth will provide the scientific basis for major international assessments and conventions, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).



## URBAN HEALTH & WELLBEING

The new programme “Health and Wellbeing in the Changing Urban Environment: a Systems Analysis Approach” was launched in 2011. Co-sponsored by the Inter-Academy Medical Panel (IAMP) and the United Nations University (UNU), this programme proposes a conceptual framework for considering the multi-factorial nature of both determinants and manifestations of health and wellbeing in urban populations. It promotes inter- and trans-disciplinary research that generates new knowledge, which can be readily used by urban policymakers to address the real-life challenges that they face. The international programme office is hosted by the Institute of Urban Environment in Xiamen, China.

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## INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ON DISASTER RISK (IRDR)

was established in 2008 to address the impacts of disasters on regional and global scales. IRDR brings together the combined talents of the natural, socio-economic, health and engineering sciences from around the world. The programme focuses on hazards related to geophysical, oceanographic, climate and weather events. IRDR’s four major projects are: Forensic In-

vestigations of Disasters (FORIN); Risk Interpretation and Action (RIA); Assessment of Integrated Research on Disaster Risk (AIRDR); and Disaster Loss Data (DATA). The international programme of science is hosted by the Institute of Remote Sensing and Digital Earth in Beijing, China. The first of a series of International Centres of Excellence for IRDR is being hosted in Taipei.

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## SCIENCE FOR POLICY

The Council has a formal role to represent the scientific community at key UN conferences relating to sustainable development, and organises regional and global consultations to inform its position. As part of the follow-up to Rio+20, it contributes expert knowledge in the process aimed at establishing a set of global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as at the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development. The recent appointment of a UN Scientific Advisory Board for sustainable development is an innovation for which the Council has long argued. Looking forward, with the help of its GeoUnion members, the IRDR programme, and regional initiatives, the Council will contribute vital scientific knowledge and capability to the post-Hyogo framework for disaster risk reduction. ICSU is working with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNESCO, and other stakeholders to ensure the success of the new science-policy platform for biodiversity and ecosystem services—IPBES—which will play a role similar to that of the IPCC in climate change. ICSU is also convening a global network of science advisors to national leaders, together with Sir Peter Gluckman, the Chief Science Advisor to the Prime Minister of New Zealand, to examine how science advice can contribute most effectively to policy-making.



# UNIVERSALITY OF SCIENCE

One of the Council's most important policy committees is the Committee on Freedom and Responsibility in the conduct of Science (CFRS). It serves as the guardian of the Council's Principle of Universality of Science. Adherence to this principle is a condition of membership in the Council. CFRS seeks to raise international awareness for the freedom and responsibility aspects related to the conduct of science and it also considers cases of individual scientists whose right to free movement, to freely associate and to communicate is infringed. CFRS is frequently called upon by members to intervene in cases concerning individual scientists in their country. It also co-organises workshops with the National Members of the Council—for example on the relationship between science assessment and research integrity.

Recently, issues relating to visas for scientists to attend international scientific meetings have particularly come to the fore, with serious concerns expressed by ICSU to national authorities worldwide. Looking forward, improving access to research data, particularly for integrated research, is a key topic. This is especially true for two of ICSU's data-related bodies, CODATA and the World Data System. To this end, these bodies are increasing their collaboration, for example by co-sponsoring conferences on data sharing and integration for global sustainability.

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