

Report on ICSU (2011 – 2014)

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Rio +20

ICSU played a key role in Rio+20, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development that was held June 20-22, 2012 in Rio de Janeiro. ICSU was the co-organizing partner for the Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for Sustainable Development that was held just prior to Rio+20. The purpose of the Forum was to help establish the research, technology and policy agendas needed after Rio+20. The Forum brought together international scientists, policy-makers, industry, NGOs, journalists and youth from over 75 countries to explore the role of interdisciplinary science and innovation in the transition to sustainable development, green economy, and poverty eradication. Rio + 20 set the stage for strong involvement of science in global sustainable development. ICSU continues to contribute to follow-up activities including the development of a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Future Earth - which was launched at Rio+20. The SDGs will incorporate the Millennium Development Goals which were aimed at eradicating poverty in developing countries. But the SDGs will apply to developed countries as well as developing countries, and will include environmental impacts such as global climate change and declining ecosystems. In March of 2014 ICSU partnered with the UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs and the International Social Science Council to organize an Expert Group Meeting on Science and Sustainable Development Goals at UN headquarters in New York.

Future Earth

Future Earth is a 10-year international research initiative to develop the knowledge needed for effectively responding to global environmental change, and for supporting transformation towards global sustainability. ICSU has been involved in all of the developmental stages of Future Earth before and during this reporting period. In 2013 a Transition Team completed a Future Earth Initial Design Report. A Science Committee was appointed to provide scientific guidance, ensure scientific quality, and guide the development of new projects. Dr. Mark-Stafford Smith chairs this Committee, and the membership represents a spectrum of global environmental change science from natural science to social sciences, humanities and engineering. An Engagement Committee was appointed to provide guidance on involving stakeholders with the research process, and to ensure that Future Earth science works in partnership with government, business and society to develop new perspectives and solutions to the challenges of sustainability. Professor Frans Berkout was appointed Interim Director of Future Earth, and an Interim Future Earth Secretariat was established and hosted at ICSU headquarters in Paris. Professor Berkout's interim appointment ends in December of 2014.

ICSU convened a Future Earth Permanent Secretariat Bidders' Conference in November

of 2013 where participants from all over the world engaged in discussions and consortium building for bids to host the Permanent Secretariat. In July of 2014 the selection of the preferred bidder for the Permanent Secretariat was announced. It is composed of five global hubs that will function as a single Secretariat. The hubs are located in Canada (Montreal), France (Paris), Japan (Tokyo), Sweden (Stockholm) and the United States (Colorado). The Secretariat will also include regional hubs that will cover Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, Europe and Asia. There is ongoing discussion on developing an African hub.

External Review

Starting in 2013 an independent review of ICSU was conducted by an External Review Panel, chaired by Professor Peter Knight. The Materials Research Society of Singapore hosted the secretariat for the Review Panel on behalf of International Union of Materials Research Societies (IUMRS). The Panel obtained input from the Unions and the National Members, and also consulted with the Regional Offices and other stakeholders.

The report of the External Review Panel was provided for the 2014 ICSU General Assembly in Auckland. A key point made in that report is that ICSU must regain its position as THE Organization that speaks for the international scientific community or risk the possibility of becoming irrelevant, and that ICSU's legitimacy for this role stems from the fact that it is the only organization that has both national members and union members that reach into some 140 countries and 31 Scientific Unions.

The Review Panel examined ICSU's relationships with other established organizations of global science (eg. TWAS, IAP and IAC), and concluded that ICSU should work out an umbrella agreement with these organizations, focusing on sharing responsibilities and modalities for collaboration. The Panel felt that ICSU should then concentrate on a limited number of flagship initiatives, such as Future Earth.

The Panel's report emphasizes that ICSU must improve the relations between the membership, the regional offices, the central secretariat and the leadership; and make efforts to develop more effective integration and "a sense of an integrated organic ICSU family rather than just interlinked structurally separated units". It also indicates that ICSU should work toward expanding the role of the biological sciences, and toward bridging the divide between the natural and the social sciences and the humanities.

The report includes a number of specific recommendations. The ICSU Executive Board will be tasked with formulating a response to the Panel's report, and making decisions regarding implementation of specific recommendations.

Unions Meeting

In April of 2013 ICSU hosted a meeting of its Union members in Paris. The meeting was an opportunity for the Unions to discuss their activities and explore areas for interdisciplinary collaboration, and working with the Regional Offices. There was particular focus on how the Unions can contribute to ICSUs global activities and programs such as Future Earth. Bruce McKellar and Stuart Palmer represented IUPAP at the meeting.

Other ICSU Programs

During this period (2011-2014), there was also a great deal of activity and development in other ICSU programs including the Urban Health and Well-Being program, the Integrated Research on Disaster Risks program, and the World Data Systems programs. IUPAP received awards from the ICSU Grants Program in 2012 (for the African School Series on Electronic Structure Methods and Applications (ASESMA), and in 2014 (for a project titled “Advancing the Agenda of Women Physicists. Learning from regional differences to take action”).

Changes in Leadership Positions

In May 2014 Carthage Smith resigned his position as Deputy Executive Director of ICSU to join the OECD Global Science Forum Secretariat.

In June 2014, ICSU’s Executive Director Steven Wilson announced his resignation to join the United Synagogue, the largest synagogue movement in Europe, as their CEO, based in London. His resignation became effective at the end of September 2014.

In September 2014 the Executive Board approved the appointment of Professor Peter Liss as Interim Executive Director of ICSU while a search for a new Executive Director is being conducted.

At the 2014 ICSU General Assembly in Auckland, IUPAP’s nominee Barbara Erazmus was elected Treasurer of ICSU. In that capacity she will be one of the six Officers of the ICSU Executive Board, and will serve as an ex- officio member of the Committee on Finance.

Professor Gordon McBean became the ICSU President at the close of the 2014 GA.