

From HDP to IHDP

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The awareness of the magnitude and importance of global environmental change led to the development of a special research program known as IGBP (International Geosphere-Biosphere Program) which was launched by ICSU (International Council of Scientific Unions) in 1986. From the very beginning the question of the human factor was raised since the acceleration and the scale of the recent change could not be understood without taking into account human actions. However, at this early stage the scientific community as represented by ICSU was not prepared to include this question into the research agenda of IGBP.

The response came from the social science community which decided to tackle the issue of human dimensions of global environmental change and look at human activities as both determinants of change and a reaction to it in the form of mitigation and adjustment.

In 1986 the ISSC (International Social Science Council) has set up an ad hoc committee to explore the possibility of launching an international social science program which would parallel and complement the IGBP. The early discussions which included a meeting in Toronto in 1987 and a symposium in Tokyo in 1988 (both co-sponsored by IFIAS-International Federation of Institutes for Advanced Study and UNU-United Nations University) as well as their workshops and consultations have led to the establishment of an ISSC program known as HDP (Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change Program) which was formally endorsed by the XVIIIth ISSC General Assembly. Its conceptual base was presented at the First Scientific Symposium held in Palma de Mallorca and outlined in a report "A Framework for Research on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change". The program was first led by Harold K. Jacobson (1986-94, including the preparatory stage) and later by Martin Parry (1995-96).

Due to generous support both from Spanish and Swiss sources, HDP activities between 1989 and 1996 were developed and coordinated from headquarters in Barcelona and Geneva. During this period a number of working groups explored various aspects of human dimensions of global environmental change. The results were presented at scientific symposia held in 1992 (Paris) and 1995 (Geneva) as well as by eight reports and six occasional papers.

The year 1996 brought about substantial changes in

the program. Since that time the HDP has been co-sponsored by ICSU and ISSC, was renamed IHDP (International Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change Program.) and is chaired by Eckart Ehlers, who was jointly appointed by both Councils. Its office, directed by a newly appointed Executive Director, Larry Kohler, is located in Bonn, thanks to a generous support from German governmental sources as well as from the University of Bonn.

More important, however, aims and goals of the new IHDP have changed as well: Just like in the past, IHDP feels that human dimensions research of global environmental change has to encompass both social and natural science disciplines, it also and likewise has to focus on individuals and societies as cause and target of such changes. All this is unquestioned. New, however, and possibly very much open to questioning is IHDP's firm belief that not all, not even a great part of urgent, pressing and interesting themes and topics, can be dealt with. Instead, the program has to concentrate on a limited and manageable number of relevant, policy-oriented and focused themes and topics. Such a concentration is necessary not only because of the limited financial resources of the program, but also because of the limitations in terms of research capabilities available to the program itself. Concentration in themes and topics, therefore, goes hand in hand with the promotion of a new "bottom-up" approach aimed at mobilizing the extensive social science resources working at the national and regional levels, and especially within the national HD Committees and programs. The goal of the IHDP is to become a service mechanism which responds to the local needs -and facilitates the sharing of local plans and results regionally and globally. This holds also true for the development of new research activities.

At present, IHDP maintains and helps to develop altogether five programs, some of them inherited from the past, others developed through strong and viable national and/or regional HD activities.

The IHDP inherited two very important and successful Joint Activities. Significant progress already was underway by the Land Use and Land Cover Change (LUCC) project (jointly sponsored by IHDP and IGBP), and the IHDP continues to give it priority support. START, another Joint Activity (WCRP/IGBP/IHDP), is making rapid progress towards its goal to promote regional research, training and capacity building support for GEC scientists. These START

goals are fully in line with IHDP's own HD/GEC objectives.

Beyond Joint Activities, however, the IHDP Scientific Committee-in full line with the afore-mentioned principles-decided it should select at present only three themes as possible priority IHDP Research Projects: a) the Institutional Dimensions of GEC (IDGC), b) Industrial Transformation and GEC (IT), and c) Human Security and GEC. These three projects were placed on a "priority fast track"-with a view to building upon previous work in these areas by the HDP while also launching a wider international review and the targeting of focused and policy relevant priority research questions within each of these themes.

In addition to these priority Research Projects, however, there are a number of "emerging" issues which, while not exactly "new", are increasingly being cited as potential priority issues for future IHDP activities. These include "Health and GEC"; "Urbanisation and GEC"; and the "Human Dimensions of Water and GEC", topics which hopefully will be taken

up by national or regional HD committees with the aim to internationalise these approaches.

It is with great emphasis that IHDP - before this outlined background - invites national and regional social science communities to create and develop new attractive, challenging and globally relevant research foci to such a state that their internationalization is a sensible alternative. It is here that IHDP's "service function" may be considered an attractive offer and the basis for cooperation between IHDP and national or regional counterparts.

By the way: IHDP has just published its first UPDATE-Newsletter which is available to all free of charge. If you are interested, contact:

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