



# ICSU

International Council for Science

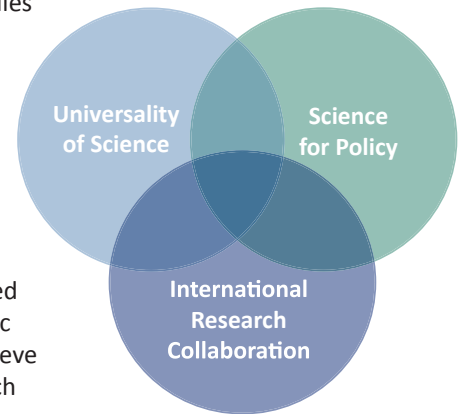
## International Council for Science

The International Council for Science (ICSU) is a non-governmental organisation with a global membership of national scientific bodies (117 Members, representing 137 countries) and International Scientific Unions (30 Members).

ICSU mobilises knowledge and resources of the international scientific community to strengthen international science for the benefit of society. Activities focus on three areas: International Research Collaboration; Science for Policy; and Universality of Science.

The long-term strategic vision is for a world where science is used for the benefit of all, excellence in science is valued and scientific knowledge is effectively linked to policy making. In order to achieve this vision, ICSU has developed a *Strategic Plan 2006–2011* which identifies key priorities and associated actions.

This briefing note summarises key priorities and provides a few examples of specific activities to illustrate how ICSU operates. More information on these and many other activities can be found at: [www.icsu.org](http://www.icsu.org)



### International Research Collaboration

ICSU works with strategic partners to plan and coordinate international research programmes that address major issues of relevance to both science and society. To this end, a number of Interdisciplinary Bodies have been created, addressing various themes, including oceans, the Antarctic, space research and solar-terrestrial physics. ICSU is also exploring whether it can make significant contributions in areas such as health and energy.

**Global Environmental Change** has been a key area for ICSU for more than 40 years. Currently, there are four global 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 (an international programme on biodiversity). Together, these programmes promote, coordinate and integrate over 2 billion euros of research and provide the scientific basis for major international assessments and conventions, including the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

**Integrated 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 will focus on hazards related to geophysical, oceanographic, climate and weather events.

**Programme on Ecosystem Change and Society (PECS)** was established in 2008, to address the scientific knowledge gaps identified in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. PECS aims to determine how policies and practices affect resilience of ecosystem services that support human well-being and allow for adaptation to a changing environment.

The **International Polar Year 2007–2008** was one of the most ambitious coordinated international science programmes ever attempted. Over 160 projects involving thousands of scientists, from over 60 countries and a wide range of research disciplines, set out to discover more about the Polar Regions and their critical influence on the rest of the planet. The results from the research will continue to become available over the coming years and will play an important role in ensuring the vitality of the Polar Regions.



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## Science for Policy

ICSU works at the intersection of science and policy, to ensure that science is integrated into international policy development and that relevant policies take into account both scientific knowledge and the needs of science. ICSU promotes dialogue and shared understanding between the scientific community, policy makers and society more broadly.

**Sustainable Development:** ICSU is working with various governmental and non-governmental partners to implement the Plan of Action that was agreed on at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002. As part of the follow-up to the WSSD, ICSU represents science at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, developing papers and organising international delegations of scientific experts to contribute to the meeting dialogues and side-events. The Commission provides a valuable forum for communicating scientific information to policy-makers and developing a needs-based multi-stakeholder research agenda for sustainable development.

**Global Earth Observation:** Global monitoring is a key link in the chain connecting interdisciplinary research to scientific assessments and policy making. ICSU, together with various UN bodies, sponsors the three global observing systems, which focus on the climate, oceans and land. ICSU is also involved in the process to develop an implementation plan for an integrated Global Earth Observation System of Systems.

**Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services:** ICSU is working with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other stakeholders to develop a science-policy platform for biodiversity and ecosystem services, which will play a role similar to that of the IPCC in climate change. The new Programme on Ecosystem Change and Society will provide scientific knowledge to the platform.

## Universality of Science

The **Principle of the Universality of Science** embodies freedom of movement, association, expression and communication for scientists as well as equitable access to data, information and research materials. The Committee on Freedom and Responsibility in the Conduct of Science serves as the guardian of the Principle, adherence to which is a condition of membership to ICSU. This committee plays an important role in resolving visa problems for individual scientists and ensuring that scientists can freely associate and communicate.

**Data and Information:** The flow of, and access to, scientific data and information are critical factors in ensuring the participation of scientists in international research. A number of ICSU bodies—including the Committee on Data for Science and Technology (CODATA), the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) and the new World Data System (WDS)—are working at both an operational and policy level to improve the quality and accessibility of various types of scientific data and information.

**Regional Offices:** ICSU has three Regional Offices—Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean. The offices support scientific networks in their regions, facilitate the participation of scientists from developing countries in the activities of ICSU and its Members, and ensure that the ICSU strategy and activities are responsive to the needs of developing countries. The activities of the offices are guided by dedicated regional scientific committees.

## Administration and Governance

The main ICSU Secretariat (16 staff in 2009) is based in Paris and ensures the day-to-day planning and operations under the guidance of an elected Executive Board. A small number of Policy Committees assist the Executive Board in its work and a General Assembly of all Members is convened every three years.

[www.icsu.org](http://www.icsu.org)

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Strengthening international science for the benefit of society