

Report on ICSU 2008 – 2011

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I represented IUPAP at the ICSU General Assembly in Maputo in September 2008. That General Assembly set up two new ICSU programs:

- Integrated Research on Disaster Risk (IRDR) and
- Programme on Ecosystem Change and Society (PECS)

These now have International Programme Offices in Beijing and in Stockholm respectively, and are in the process of constructing their work programmes. IRDR was set up first and is the more advanced.

The same GA also agreed to review the many programmes associated with Earth System Science, and went through an extensive web based consultation process to do so and to determine what the community thought were the main challenges in Earth System Science. At the same time the Belmont Group of funding agencies approached ICSU to undertake a related review. As a result of all of these initiatives, the GA in Rome in September, 2011 agreed to establish a new programme — the Earth System Sustainability Initiative (ESSI). At present a transition team is working to determine how existing programmes will be incorporated into this new programme, and to establish details of how the new programme will work. One important feature of this transition team is that it includes representatives of the funding agencies.

In 2010 ICSU was approached to participate in the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, or Rio+20). It has run workshops in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, the Arab world, and Europe, which will provide scientific input to the Regional Preparatory Meetings and then to the UNCSD in Rio in May-June 2012.

Other initiatives established by the Maputo GA were a science planning group on “Health and Wellbeing in a Changing Urban Environment — a Systems Analysis Approach”, and an ad-hoc working group to “define ICSU’s future role in Science Education”. Both groups reported to the Rome GA, which established a new initiative on Health and Wellbeing in a Changing Urban Environment, and agreed that while science education was important, it was being well done by many other groups including ICSU National Members and Unions and that science education (including outreach) should be a part of all future ICSU programmes.

Before 2008, ICSU had established Regional Offices in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia and the Pacific, but in the last 3 years these have come of age and are beginning to work on assisting with the implementation of ICSU programmes in their region, and ensuring that these programmes reach the least developed countries of the region.

It is clear from this report that ICSU works by building on the scientific strength of the Unions and establishing interdisciplinary programmes to bring these together for a common purpose, delivering science of the benefit of society. A major concentration for the next 6 years or more will be on sustainability in one way or another. There are opportunities for IUPAP and physicists to become more involved in these. For example the 2005 IUPAP GA received an excellent report on Energy, and IUPAP may wish to publicise the role of physics in sustainability science, and look for ways to benefit from ICSU initiatives.

Professor Y T Lee, a Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, assumed office as ICSU President at the close of the 2011 GA.

The 2011 ICSU GA elected Kennedy Reed to the Executive Board of ICSU for 2011-2014. We look forward to closer relations between IUPAP and ICSU as a result of that appointment.