

ALL attention is on Copenhagen. The basis of the talks are, of course, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessments and the UN's Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice. We are asked to supply our latest research findings to both processes.

IPCC and IGBP began just over 20 years ago. Since then, climate has moved close to the top of the international political agenda and IPCC has adapted to meet the needs of governments. Indeed, IPCC is now seen as a gold standard for evidence-based policy.

The Swedish researcher, Bert Bolin, a key architect of both IPCC and IGBP, set up programmes like IGBP and the World Climate Research Programme to coordinate research internationally, and IPCC to assess it. But, IGBP was established in recognition that climate change is part of a larger challenge – global en-



vironmental change. In the last 20 years, IGBP scientists have demonstrated that humans are the main driver of global environmental change.

Is there an adequate system, like IPCC, to assess the state of knowledge of all of the planet's key natural cycles,

how they are linked and how society is affecting them? Key areas in need of synthesis include the global nitrogen cycle, megacities and the coastal zone, environmental change and the needs of least developed nations, land cover and climate, aerosols and others.

IGBP's new integration, synthesis and exploration initiative (page 5), initially in ten policy-relevant areas, aims to bring together many disciplines in a truly integrated way to reduce uncertainty in the areas highlighted above. This, we hope, will contribute to a baseline for international research and policy in the coming decade. ■

“Is there an adequate system to assess the state of knowledge of all key natural cycles?”