

December 2012 witnessed the formal dissolution of the Earth System Science Partnership (ESSP) in anticipation of the start of the Future Earth initiative. Set up by IGBP and the other three global-change programmes following the highly successful Amsterdam conference in 2001, ESSP aimed to facilitate an integrated look at the Earth system and promote greater interaction between the programmes. The continued collaboration among the programmes is a testimony to this legacy.



complex interlinkages among the various components of the global water system. Project researchers also recently reviewed the global threats to human water security and biodiversity based on a global database of rivers.

The Global Environmental Change and Food Systems (GECAFS) project sought to understand the relationships between environmental change and food security by developing appropriate methodologies. Central to the project's work was the holistic concept of

For over a decade, ESSP brought the programmes together via its joint projects, integrated regional studies and capacity-building activities. The joint projects addressed themes that cut across the remits of the individual global-change programmes: energy and the carbon cycle, food security, water resources and human health. The Global Environmental Change and Human Health (GECHH) project is finding its feet but the other projects have produced a substantial body of work.

The Global Carbon Project (GCP) takes a comprehensive look at both the biogeochemical and social aspects of the carbon cycle at a time when the climate effects of increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide are becoming ever more apparent. The project has not only coordinated international research into the carbon cycle but also synthesised it to provide novel perspectives. During the past few years, GCP's Global Carbon Budget (see page 6 of this issue) has become an invaluable resource for scientists, the media and the policy community.

The Global Water System Project (GWSP) focuses on the human modification of the water cycle and its impacts on societies and ecosystems. An important contribution of the project has been the creation of a digital water atlas, which provides online access to maps and datasets that clarify the

food systems, which accounts for not only food production but also its storage, delivery, pricing and consumption. One of the legacies of the project, which came to a close in 2011, is the creation of the Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFA) project.

Although ESSP has closed, its joint projects will continue to function during the transition to Future Earth under the guidance of the four global-change programmes. IGBP collaborates closely with the other global-change programmes and will continue to engage the joint projects. Moreover, IGBP's own activities continue to generate new scientific insights.

ESSP played an important coordinating function by collating the research of the global-change programmes and presenting it to various policy fora, most notably the Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA). IGBP is now representing the programmes as their liaison with SBSTA.

ESSP was a bold attempt to bring together researchers that approached global environmental change from very different perspectives. An evaluation of the successes and failures of this attempt holds important lessons for new initiatives such as Future Earth. ■

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