

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

2016-2018

futureearth
research for global sustainability

I. INTRODUCTION

Communities across the planet face an array of challenges that will have a profound influence on their livelihoods, cultures and health and the sustainability of the environment: from securing supplies of clean drinking water to conserving fisheries and other natural assets and building toward low-carbon economies. Addressing these major challenges requires internationally coordinated research. That is the 10-year mission of Future Earth – to provide knowledge and solutions that will support transformations to global sustainability. It is a mission that depends on greater collaboration among natural and social scientists, scholars in the humanities and artists. And our success depends on deep engagement with leaders in policy, business, civil society and more.

Future Earth builds on more than three decades of global environmental change research programmes. We carry

forward the legacy of DIVERSITAS, the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) and the International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change (IHDP). Their research has improved our understanding of the connections between human societies and the Earth's atmosphere, oceans and land and has illuminated the risks facing both the planet and its people.

Through the [Engagement](#) and [Science](#) Committees and [Governing Council](#), Future Earth continues to fulfill its 10-year roadmap for implementing the [Future Earth 2025 Vision](#) that articulates eight societal challenges to sustainability. The present document summarises the plan to implement that vision over the two-year period from 2016 to 2018.



THEORY OF CHANGE

At Future Earth, our theory of change emphasises how we will break down barriers within the scientific community and between research and society. Today, many researchers, policy-makers and institutions work in “silos,” bound by scientific disciplines or fields of expertise. These silos limit the collective capacity of the world to generate the research and innovations needed to address complex global problems. Furthermore, researchers are sometimes disconnected from society, policy experts, practitioners, implementing bodies, the media and other sectors that are best placed to apply research to solve these challenges. Similarly, scientists are largely excluded from

international multilateral negotiations, an absence that also limits society's capacity to use knowledge to address global issues.

Future Earth's [Global Research Projects](#), Fast-Track Initiatives and [Knowledge-Action Networks](#) help to address these gaps and break down silos. They do that by linking the expertise of networks of researchers with policy-makers, business leaders, practitioners and a range of other societal partners to collaboratively produce solutions-oriented research. We are committed to the rapid integration of knowledge into policy and practice.

II. OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE 1

“Future Earth will facilitate and create ground-breaking transdisciplinary science”

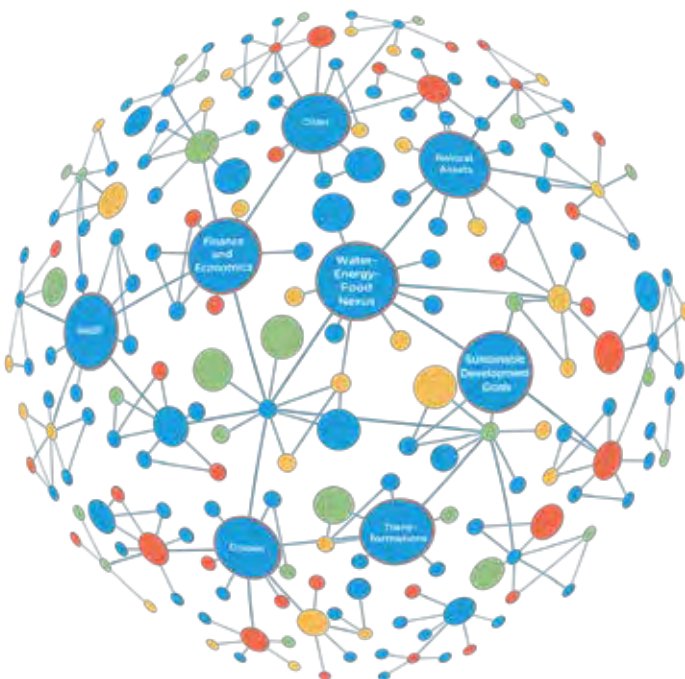
Future Earth’s Global Research Projects and research initiatives will play a key role in developing a series of Knowledge-Action Networks. These networks will directly address the eight key challenges to global sustainability that we described in our 2025 Vision. Future Earth is designing an additional series of networks that cut across multiple challenges.

Future Earth envisions that these Knowledge-Action Networks will serve the following functions in a coordinated and interactive way:

- Convene, co-design, co-produce and co-disseminate research
- Deliver syntheses and products for decision-making to favour sustainability
- Monitor, evaluate and learn to improve research
- Underpin these functions by:
 - Engaging decision-makers from all relevant stakeholder groups
 - Optimising collaborative learning for continuous progress
 - Communicating research priorities, outputs and solutions
 - Mobilising capacities to enhance impact

In 2016, Future Earth plans to launch at least eight Knowledge-Action Networks, which include the following topics:

- Water-Energy-Food Nexus
- Oceans
- Transformations
- Natural Assets
- Sustainable Development Goals
- Urban
- Health
- Finance & Economics



PRIORITIES FOR 2016-2018

1. Building the initial set of Knowledge-Action Networks into global, widely-recognised multi-stakeholder communities that produce solutions-oriented research
2. Establishing an ongoing programme of Fast-Track Initiatives to foster collaboration across disciplines, sectors and constituencies on important questions in sustainability
3. Strengthening the engagement of Global Research Project communities in the Knowledge-Action Networks, while also expanding the involvement of new communities
4. Delivering strong research agendas to funders globally from the initial set of Knowledge-Action Networks

OBJECTIVE 2

“Future Earth will deliver products and services that societal partners need and use”



Photo: Future Earth / Erik Pihl

Future Earth’s Global Research Projects and research initiatives produce a large number of synthesis and foresight publications and other research outputs that advance knowledge in global sustainability. Future Earth adds value to these efforts by coordinating the activities of our scientific community so that research products achieve maximum impact. We do that by bringing the latest scientific advances to high-profile global policy fora and by engaging the media, civil society, businesses, innovators and other audiences through targeted communications products.

PRIORITIES FOR 2016-2018

1. Producing timely and impactful synthesis publications in global sustainability science
2. Spawning innovative solutions in public, private and civil society sectors
3. Developing science-policy-society interface products, services and interventions to improve the use of knowledge in decision-making
4. Generating publications, workshops, communications products and other tools through the Knowledge-Action Networks
5. Publishing research findings and syntheses in widely-read media and scientific outlets to influence transformations to a sustainable world

Examples of our upcoming work

2016: Launch the Future Earth Media Lab and the magazine *Anthropocene: Innovation in the Human Age* with the International Council for Science (ICSU) and Globaia.

2017: Begin several projects in collaboration with the private sector to convert research findings into on-the-ground solutions for sustainability.

2017: Help to organise a major conference on “Implementing Sustainable Development Goals in the Anthropocene.” Partners on this effort include the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).

2017: Publish a peer-reviewed article outlining what research is needed to support the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Partners on this effort include the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP).

2018: In collaboration with the The World in 2050 project, help to produce a book on the societal transitions needed to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Partners on this effort include SDSN.

OBJECTIVE 3

“Future Earth will co-design and co-produce solutions-oriented research, knowledge and innovation for sustainable development”

Future Earth is part of a global community seeking to evolve the paradigm of engagement from involving “science-policy” interfaces to triangular “science-policy-society” interfaces. This shift in the scientific community recognises the important role that stakeholders can play in the production and use of knowledge, helping to shape research, insulating scientists from undue bias and advocating for the use of new knowledge in decision-making.

To meet these goals, we reach out to leaders in a wide range of arenas, from government agencies to technology businesses and non-governmental organisations, to drive a transformation in engagement and create innovative partnerships. We also contribute to key international policy processes, such as IPCC, the Intergovernmental

Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and Habitat III. We work to ensure that science has a key role in decision-making at all levels.

Future Earth’s engagement activities, which we highlight in our [Engagement Principles and Practice](#) document, are guided by the following principles:

- Proactive engagement is a prerequisite of Future Earth activities
- Engagement needs to be flexible
- Engagement approaches must address potential tensions and vested interests
- Engagement approaches need to be inclusive and transparent

PRIORITIES FOR 2016-2018

1. Building partnerships with global sustainability initiatives in businesses and civil society organisations that align with Future Earth on regional or thematic levels
2. Promoting and evolving the co-design, co-production and co-dissemination of knowledge
3. Developing targeted approaches for engaging specific constituencies, such as the public and private sectors and civil society, in the triangle of science-policy-society interface
4. Putting leading engagement approaches into practice in our own work and those of our partners.

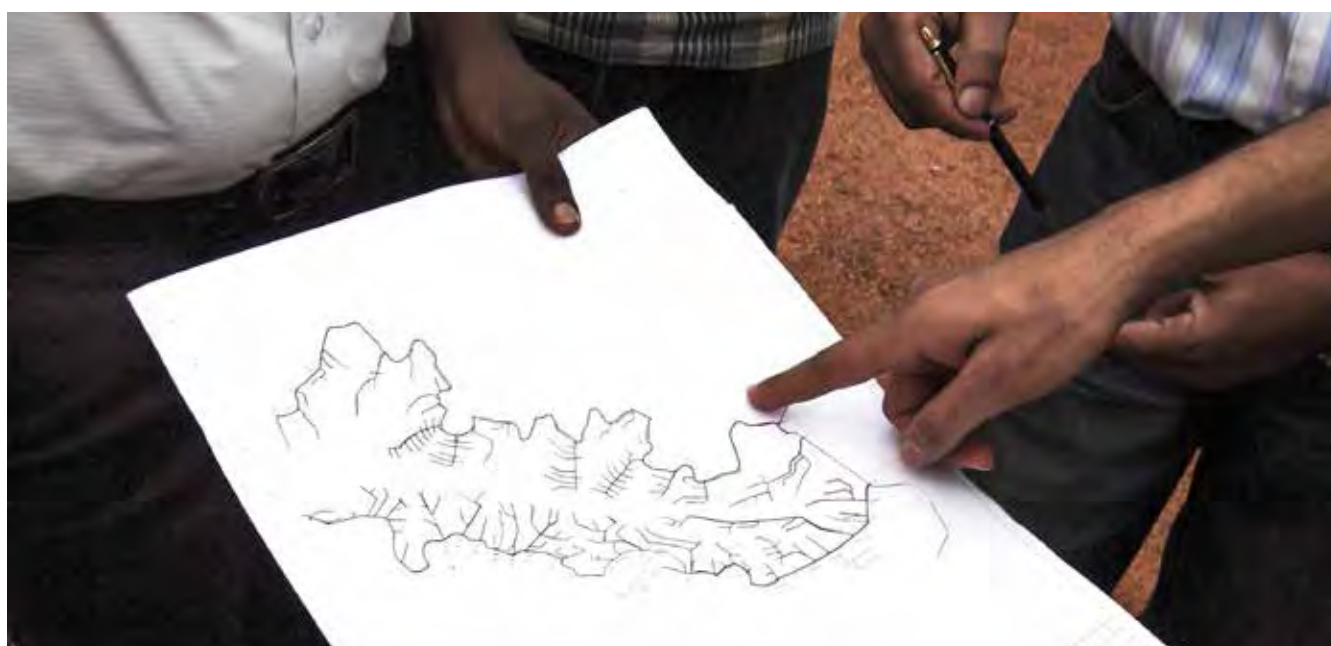


Photo: Future Earth / Hideyuki Mohri

OBJECTIVE 4

“Future Earth will enable and mobilise capacities for research to inform and advance sustainable development”

For the world to respond to the most pressing challenges to sustainability, nations and regions must develop local solutions. Our regional and national networks are key components of our community and are critical to adapting and evolving the vision of Future Earth to meet the needs of a diverse world.

Future Earth is uniquely suited for mobilising capacity in a range of nations and regions and in a manner that spans science, policy and practice. We are mobilising capacity as a way to magnify our impact by engaging with early- and mid-career professionals, diverse groups and organisations and multiple sectors around the world.

These national and regional networks, led by centres, offices, committees and more, play an integral role in Future Earth and serve the following functions:

- Connect Future Earth to local, national and regional policy and societal partners
- Serve as conduits between international science and local, national and regional researchers
- Provide a regional and national perspective of priorities for research and engagement on emerging challenges to sustainability
- Engage national and local stakeholders in the work of Future Earth with a geographically relevant approaches
- Coordinate and organise workshops, training programmes and conferences on sustainability research and launch national and regional-level research initiatives
- Support fundraising for Future Earth activities among local, national and regional funding communities
- Raise visibility of Future Earth through targeted communications and engagement

PRIORITIES FOR 2016-2018

1. Establishing regional and national networks with a strong global coverage and clear goals, programmes and benchmarks aligned with the vision and activities of Future Earth
2. Developing a global strategy to engage early- and mid-career researchers and professionals in sustainability science
3. Facilitating the engagement of researchers and professionals from the public, private and civil society sectors from lower-income countries in international science processes
4. Strengthening capacity at the individual, organisational and systems level in skills relevant to the co-design, co-production and co-dissemination of knowledge



Photo: Future Earth / Erik Pihl

III.

MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION



Photo: Future Earth / Erik Pihl

COMMUNICATIONS

Future Earth's communications portfolio includes digital and print publications, a blog, social media campaigns, capacity mobilising webinars and more. In 2016, we are launching several flagship communications projects:

1. [Future Earth Open Network](#)
2. [Future Earth Media Lab](#)
3. [The Anthropocene - Innovation in the Human Age](#)

FUNDRAISING & ADVANCEMENT

Future Earth has set ambitious milestones for meeting the four objectives. Our work encompasses the activities of the former global environmental change programmes DIVERSITAS, IGBP and IHDP. To meet these broad goals and milestones, we are making ambitious efforts in advancement and fundraising focusing on National Contributions, Programmatic Funding and Strategic Partnerships.

PEOPLE & PARTNERS

PEOPLE

Our people are our greatest asset. Central to our efforts are participants in Future Earth's Global Research Projects, research initiatives and Knowledge Action-Networks; the Future Earth Governing Council; Science and Engagement Committees; and project officers of DIVERSITAS, IGBP and IHDP. Future Earth operates a globally distributed [Secretariat](#) with 24-hour operations around the world. This staff is based in the five Global Hubs located in Colorado, Montreal, Paris, Sweden and Tokyo and in Regional Centres and Offices on four continents.

PARTNERS

Future Earth recognises that addressing the eight key challenges to global sustainability requires deep and enduring collaborations among diverse research communities and societal partners around important science initiatives. Through our partnership strategy, we seek to generate new knowledge to inform the implementation of sustainability solutions. Future Earth welcomes partnerships with a wide range of organisations that align with our goals.

IV. CONCLUSION

Future Earth creates knowledge to support transformations to long-term sustainability. We do that by promoting and fostering high-quality fundamental and policy-relevant research. Future Earth plays a critical role in converting scientific findings into sustainability solutions across the world, particularly with regard to equitable economic development, shared prosperity and universal well-being.

In 2016-2018, Future Earth will make the following major advancements to fulfill this vision:

- 1. Outcomes in science:** Through its Global Research Projects, research initiatives and Knowledge-Action Networks, Future Earth will generate fundamental, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary science directed at sustainability challenges. Future Earth will facilitate the field of transdisciplinary, co-designed, co-produced and co-disseminated research.
- 2. Outcomes in engagement** Future Earth will provide knowledge to support evidence-based international, national and local sustainability policy. Future Earth will engage businesses, civil society practitioners and funding communities in the co-design, co-production and co-dissemination of research.
- 3. Outcomes in funding:** Future Earth will create diversified funding models that go beyond traditional public funding agencies to include the private sector, philanthropic organisations and development agencies. Future Earth will advocate for an increase in funding for research on global environmental change, social equity and sustainability. Future Earth will spur more funding for science and science capacity mobilising in developing countries. Future Earth will continue its strategy of securing sustainable funding for the Secretariat, the backbone of scientific and engagement activities.

GOVERNING COUNCIL



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY



INTERNATIONAL
COUNCIL
FOR SCIENCE

