



Urbanization and Global Environmental Change

AN IHDP CORE PROJECT

UGEC Project Scoping Meeting London, UK | February 21-22, 2014

Concept Note

*Corrie Griffith, UGEC Executive Officer
Roberto Sánchez Rodríguez, UGEC SSC Co-Chair
Karen C. Seto, UGEC SSC Co-Chair*

Rationale

Established as an International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change (IHDP) core project in 2006, the Urbanization and Global Environmental Change (UGEC) Project has since worked to better our understanding of the regional and global implications of urbanization and the complex dynamic systems of urban areas that affect and are affected by global environmental change. Specifically, the project fosters the development of innovative conceptual and methodological frameworks for UGEC research, which is organized by four broad themes: 1) Processes within the urban system that contribute to global environmental change; 2) Pathways through which specific global environmental changes affect urban systems; 3) The resulting interactions and responses within the urban system, once these pathways and points of interaction are identified; and 4) Consequences of the interactions within the urban system on global environmental change, or feedback processes.

UGEC will conclude its ten-year mandate in early 2016 and is currently entering a sunset phase characterized by synthesis activities. These activities will not only offer an assessment of the research produced over this timeframe, but also will be forward-thinking - identifying gaps in knowledge and future research foci.

Goals

As part of this synthesis process, UGEC is organizing a scoping meeting of leaders from allied communities to explore potential directions for urban themes within the new research framework of Future Earth (<http://www.icsu.org/future-earth>). As the existing Global Change Programmes (IHDP, IGBP, DIVERSITAS and WCRP) are phasing out and transitioning to Future Earth, so too will UGEC make this transition. Key principles that underscore the research and governance of Future Earth are *Scientific Excellence; Interdisciplinarity; Co-design and Co-production*. Therefore, new urban research frameworks within Future Earth will need to incorporate these principles into their design. **The primary purpose of this scoping meeting is to identify and discuss areas of research that could underpin a new urban initiative in the context of Future Earth.**

Format

This is a *workshop* with 20-30 participants. Participants are expected to provide pre-workshop written materials, which will be collated and distributed to all workshop participants in advance.



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These materials and other background documents will be the basis for discussion during the workshop. **No oral presentations will be delivered by participants.** The workshop will be organized to foster discussion through small break-out groups intermixed with plenary sessions. A more detailed agenda will be constructed and shared with all participants at a later date.

Pre-workshop materials

The individuals attending this meeting will represent a variety of regions and perspectives with diverse experiential knowledge and research expertise. In this case, we ask that each participant prepare a background paper addressing key questions and issues that are important in the context of Future Earth and will inform the break-out and larger group discussions. These background papers will be uploaded to an online access-only location for participants to read and hopefully catalyze further idea sharing and brainstorming prior to the event. The guiding questions for the background papers crosscut the three research themes of Future Earth¹ (Dynamic Planet, Global Development, and Transformations towards Sustainability):

- a. What are the key urban research and policy questions that are critical to be included in the Future Earth framework?²
- b. What are the gaps in knowledge, i.e., potential future areas of urban research that would aid in the transformation to global sustainability?
- c. What are the major challenges and opportunities for developing conceptual and methodological frameworks that support the global transformation to sustainability in the context of an urbanizing planet?
- d. What operational mechanisms must be in place for a successful interdisciplinary urban-themed project that fits within Future Earth and how can they be created?

Outcome

The output from the meeting will be a 'straw-man' proposal for a new urban initiative or initiatives under the auspices of Future Earth. This document should clearly identify the direction and key themes for future research and will ultimately provide the project's foundation and conceptual underpinning. This document will be shared with the wider UGEC network and allied communities. The intent is that the ideas presented therein will further develop over time through a participatory process that engages these communities through their suggestions and feedback.

¹ More information about the Future Earth research framework and themes can be found in the 2013 *Future Earth Initial Design Report* prepared by the Future Earth Transition Team. Available online: (http://www.icsu.org/future-earth/media-centre/relevant_publications/future-earth-initial-design-report).

² The following are examples of such urban questions and the Future Earth themes to which they relate: a.) Considering current and projected trends, why and how are urban areas critical for global sustainability? (Theme 1); b.) What is the role of urban areas addressing pressing needs of humanity within the context of global environmental change? (Theme 2); c.) What social practices can lead to urban transformations towards more inclusive, equitable, and resilient urban areas and reduce their impact on the local and global environment? (Theme 3); d.) Can new pathways towards sustainability be built in urban areas and how can they be achieved? (Theme 3).