

**Human Dimensions of
Global Environmental Change Programme**

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Discussion Groups

Data for Global Change

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HDP/DIS already exists as a potential mechanism for cataloguing, archiving, and retrieving HDP data through an agreement with the Consortium for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) which will facilitate access to data using an electronic metadata directory. There are already a HDP gopher and World Wide Web (WWW) home page. Special mechanisms are required to supply data to those in parts of the world without electronic access.

There is a high priority need for sub-national disaggregation of data and use of data at different scales. This requires georeferencing of data, to avoid the problem of many different geographic sampling units. There may be problems with georeferencing some kinds of social science data, such as economic data and sample surveys, which could be addressed by an HDP work group. Georeferencing will multiply the usefulness of data to address many problems at different scales and will facilitate interrelating environmental and socio-economic information.

Another priority is the need for time series of critical data sets, including those extending far back into the past and documenting trends of global change that may develop over decades or centuries into the future.

Preference could be given to measures that have received wide agreement (such as GDP) that concern universal problems or that are part of a core data set that apply to many different issues. There is also a need for information on policy responses and policy instruments and on such things as the many proposed variants to GDP, green GDP, etc. HDP research needs basic physical information on global changes and means to combine different kinds of data sets electronically, which could be facilitated by recommending standard formats.

One issue raised was the problem of obtaining access to data, because of commercialization (making them unaffordable), government reluctance to share data, or military secrecy. The costs and benefits of access to data could even be a subject for HDP research.

It is important to distinguish data collected by scientists from information which must have a useful purpose or relevance in a particular context and preferably be in terms that policy-makers can understand. The growing work on indicators driven by demands from decision-makers can contribute to this. There are new data requirements for Development Watch, Earthwatch, and global modelling efforts that can bridge research and information of policy relevance and help to identify priority required data sets.

Different views were expressed on the need to start with questions and only collect data to address those questions, as opposed to neutral data collection in order to maintain the capacity to respond to unknown future questions. There were concerns for costs of obtaining and maintaining well-documented data, the impossibility of keeping all data – requiring choices and priorities – and the problems in some countries of archiving data in ways that make them accessible and useful for future needs, including needs that cannot now be anticipated. Some countries lack institutions mandated and funded to carry out this long-term data archiving function.