

TEXT BOX

The GCOS Regional Workshop Programme

One of the major thrusts of the Global Climate Observing System Secretariat in recent years has been the implementation of its Regional Workshop Programme. This Programme, launched in 2000 following an invitation from the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in November 1999, comprised workshops and follow-up meetings in ten developing regions.

The central goal of the GCOS Regional Workshop Programme was to initiate processes in developing regions that would lead to real, substantial, and lasting improvements in global climate observing systems. The specific objectives for each workshop were to assess the contribution of each region to GCOS baseline networks; to help participants understand guidelines for reporting on systematic observations to the UNFCCC; to identify national and regional needs and deficiencies for climate data, including needs for assessing climate impacts, conducting vulnerability analyses, and undertaking adaptation studies; and to initiate the development of a Regional Action Plan for improving climate observing systems.

Action Plans have been developed for all ten regions in the Programme, including the Pacific Islands, Eastern and Southern Africa, Central America and the Caribbean, East and Southeast Asia, Western and Central Africa, South America, Central Asia, South and Southwest Asia, Eastern and Central Europe, and the Mediterranean Basin. In all, representatives of some 180 countries took part in the Programme, and over 115 priority projects were proposed. Common needs include sustaining and improving operational observing networks; recovering historical data; improving national and regional co-ordination; education, training, and capacity building; and national planning and reporting.

Since the completion of the Programme in 2006, some implementation progress has been made in most regions. However, much remains to be done. Constraints to continued progress are the need for donor engagement in project funding and for sustaining committed leadership at the regional level. The focus of follow-up activities for both GCOS and for the regions is now on implementation. The Pacific Islands region has progressed further than any other in implementing its Action Plan and perhaps best illustrates the importance of donor engagement and partnership. However, "one size does not fit all," and each region has special characteristics and ways of interacting with its members that will require it to find its unique way forward.

If implementation of the Regional Action Plans is to be successful, then GCOS, the regions, and the international community each need to recognize special responsibilities. For the GCOS Secretariat, with its small staff and global mission, the focus needs to be on facilitating and promoting the relevant activities of others, including assisting the regions to identify sources of funding. For the regions, it will be important to take ownership of the Action Plans, thus assuming the primary responsibility for seeing that the Plans and their individual projects are implemented. The international community, for its part, will need to assist by doing more to provide the resources that developing regions have so much difficulty contributing themselves. The international community must recognize that improving observing systems in developing countries not only benefits those countries but also benefits developed countries as well.

If anything, the need for high-quality climate observations has become even more important in recent years as their utility for designing prudent adaptation strategies, and for sustainable development generally, has become better recognized. Although the Regional Workshop Programme has now formally ended, it is important that continued attention be given to implementing the Regional Action Plans. Continued support by the Conference of the Parties is important as a clear signal of support for future progress.