

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **International Council for Science (ICSU) launches major research programme on natural disasters**

**With an increase in the frequency of disasters, there is an urgent need to address the knowledge gaps that are preventing the effective application of science to averting disasters**

**Maputo, Mozambique**—in response to the urgent need to reduce the impacts of natural disasters, the International Council for Science (ICSU) has launched a new, 10-year, international research programme designed to address the gaps in the knowledge and methods that are preventing the effective application of science to averting disasters and reducing risk. The programme was announced today at the 29th ICSU General Assembly in Maputo, Mozambique.

Each year hundreds of thousands of people are killed and millions injured, displaced or have their livelihoods destroyed by natural disasters. There has been a dramatic increase in the frequency of disasters—when communities are overwhelmed and need outside assistance—from around 30 per year in the 1950s to more than 470 per year since the beginning of this century.

'Integrated Research on Disaster Risk (IRDR) will provide an enhanced capacity around the world to address hazards and make better decisions to reduce their impacts', said Gordon McBean, Canadian climatologist and Chair of the ICSU Planning Group for Hazards.

'In 10 years, as a result of this programme, we would like to see a reduction in loss of life, fewer people adversely impacted, and wiser investments and choices made by governments, the private sector and civil society'.

Invariably, it is the poorest countries that are least well equipped to cope with disasters and which suffer the most.

'Disaster events in a region like Africa can have an enormous impact on economic activities and livelihoods. Mozambique is especially vulnerable to disasters, particularly those triggered by weather and climate. IRDR will provide knowledge that will support better decision making processes within the country, paving the way for improved disaster risk management,' said Filipe Domingos Freires Lucio, a member of the ICSU Planning Group and a former Director-General of the National Institute of Meteorology of Mozambique, now at the World Meteorological Organization.

'With the predicted impacts of climate change, countries like Mozambique have no alternative but to integrate disaster risk reduction in development planning and climate change adaptation.'

The new programme, which builds on existing research activities, will address the impacts of disasters on all scales, from local to global. It will combine experience and expertise from around the world, and provide an unprecedented opportunity for the natural and social sciences to work together as never before.

McBean said, 'A truly global, interdisciplinary approach is essential if we are to provide the knowledge that can avoid unnecessary losses and save thousands, or even millions of lives'.

IRDR will focus on all hazards related to geophysical, oceanographic, climate and weather trigger events—and even space weather and impact by near-Earth objects. The programme will also take account of the effects of human activities in creating hazards—or making them worse.

The science plan for IRDR and more on the General Assembly are available at:  
[www.icsu.org/3\\_mediacentre/GA\\_29.html](http://www.icsu.org/3_mediacentre/GA_29.html)

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### **About ICSU**

Founded in 1931, ICSU is a non-governmental organization with a global membership of national scientific bodies (114 Members, representing 134 countries) and International Scientific Unions (29 Members). The Council is frequently called upon to speak on behalf of the global scientific community and to act as an advisor in matters ranging from the environment to conduct in science. ICSU's activities focus on three areas: planning and coordinating research; science for policy; and strengthening the Universality of Science.

### **About the IRDR programme**

Integrated Research on Disaster Risk (IRDR) is a major new international initiative of the International Council for Science (ICSU). The programme addresses the impacts of disasters on regional and global scales and brings together the combined talents of the natural, socio-economic, health and engineering sciences from around the world.

The IRDR programme has three research objectives. The first addresses the gaps in the knowledge and methods for the effective identification and forecast of risks leading to the effective application of science towards averting disasters and reducing risk.

The second is to understand decision-making in risk management and how human decisions and the factors that affect such decisions contribute to hazards becoming disasters—or the reduction of their effects.

The third objective, building on the first two, is to develop knowledge-based actions that will reduce risk and curb the losses caused by hazards and disasters.

Three cross-cutting themes will support the objectives: capacity building, including mapping capacity for disaster reduction and building self-sustaining capacity at various levels for different hazards; the development of case studies and demonstration projects; and assessment, data management and monitoring of hazards, risks and disasters.

An important element of the programme is the development of case studies that will analyse disasters caused by natural phenomena to establish what was done well and what caused failure—to avoid repeating mistakes.

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