How to unite geological community better

The energy of IUGS resides in its unity. Only through a united effort can the Union implement its aims in the advancement of geological sciences, applying the results to improving the prosperity of nations and the quality of human life, and strengthening public awareness of geology.

In order to get support from its members, IUGS must let them feel regarded by IUGS and see tangible benefits from IUGS. When geologists of a member country go to their superiors to request for money for their country's annual subscriptions, they are often asked this simple question, "what do we get from IUGS?"

Of course, there are obvious benefits for the members of IUGS such as:

- Better access to international geo-scientific activities, such as the International Geological Congress, the International Year of Planet Earth, IGCP and other activities organized by UNESCO and ICSU
- Access to the service of international geological standards, such as provided by the International Commission of Stratigraphy, the Commission of the Geological Maps of the World
- Access to important databases, such as Geochemical Baseline
- Other service, such as the history of geological sciences
- IUGS publications: Episodes, IUGS web site, non-serial publications etc.

However, there is still a big room of improvement if we can make better use of our strengths and avoid weakness.

The unique strengths of IUGS are its broad coverage of geological scientific disciplines and nations. IUGS is unique among the great many earth science-related institutions in the world; it has been commonly and widely accepted as representing the interests of the global geological community.

The weaknesses of IUGS are its small budget in comparison with many of the earth science-related institutions around the world and its lack of awareness among some part of the global geological community.

In order to unite members of IUGS, first of all it should establish better communication between IUGS and its members.

International conferences are of course one of the best forms of communication. However, it is also the most expensive form of communication. It is obvious that one year member fee of a country of category 1 is insufficient for an average international trip. With the financial capability of IUGS, only a small percentage of member countries can get chance once a year for one person to travel. Even for that fortunate country, the vast majority of geologists still cannot share the benefit. From year to year, many member countries and most of the geologists will feel there is not much benefit for them and gradually lose their interest to IUGS.

However, conference is not the only way to unite world geo-scientific community. If IUGS can more fully develop the potential of its unique position in the world geological community and put its main effort on the organization and coordination of the world geo-scientific activities rather than to support particular projects, much more things can be done with the limited budget.

The rapid development of information and communication technologies, however, has provided great opportunity for geological sciences, since the major product of geological research is knowledge in the form of information. The pressing matter is to establish regular networking via Internet with all the members. Another alternative is to use teleconferencing system with Power-Point presentation capability, white board and other functions. Of

course, IUGS should support valuable conferences in the future; but must restrict to a few cases. For most international conferences, the participants should be encouraged to seek the support from other sources rather than IUGS.

As a first step, it is essential to revitalize the Committee of Research Direction (I agree with Robin Brett that the name should be something like "Committee of Strategic Planning", because IUGS does not do research itself). Then the CRD can organize experts of different branches of geo-sciences to figure out the state-of-the-art of the given branch in the world, the main international, interdisciplinary topics of joint activities to be organized by IUGS and plan for future cooperation. In this process, the IT should be used extensively and conference only rarely.

I don't think it is an easy task. In order to minimize the risk associated with the transition, we can go ahead in a "trial and error" way, starting with small-scale activities. The existing practice can be continued as before without abrupt changes, since at the beginning stage the IT does not require large expenditure. Substantial change can be made only after most people feel comfortable with the new manner of work.

Because of the historical reason, the relationship between IGC and IUGS had some problem. The past EC had made a great effort to merge IGC with IUGS. The next IGC will be held in Norway. Nordic countries played important role in the founding of IUGS in early sixties of the last century. The aim of the founding of IUGS at that time was to fill the gap between Congresses. Now it is the good chance to better integrate IGC into the whole set of activities of IUGS. In my opinion, the relationship between IUGS and IGC should be very much like the relationship between International Olympic Committee and Olympic Game.

To apply the results to improving the prosperity of nations and the quality of human life, IUGS should investigate, recommend and disseminate successful case histories of application for different branches, organize bilateral or multi-lateral cooperation under different conditions.

To strengthen public awareness of geology, we already have our International Year of Planet Earth for next few years. With the limited financial resources, IUGS cannot afford too many projects simultaneously; it should concentrate its effort of publicity mainly in IYPE. Unfortunately, geology has not gained enough attention of the society. There was no position of geologists at the Rio Summit. In Johannesburg, the situation was not better. In Kobe with much narrower scope, again there was no voice of geologists heard. To improve this situation, systematic effort must be made. In the immediate future, IUGS should initiate the process to become associated with the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) and attain the consultative status of UN ECOSOC.

The Executive Committee of IUGS has been elected by member countries. Transparency and democracy is an important precondition to get the trust and support of the member countries. It is also true for all other IUGS bodies.

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