IUGS: the next four years

Ten years ago, the IUGS recognized the need to introduce changes in order to reflect the new circumstances that were evolving in the world. That vision resulted in a Strategic Action Plan which was approved in the year 2000, and slightly modified in 2004 by a document entitled Vision & Road Map towards 2011, the year that the Union will celebrate its 50th anniversary. With these two documents in our hands and a series of actions being carried out, it seems that we are just walking on the right path and that it is only necessary to follow it. However, a series of actions still need to be considered and implemented. These include: 1) the role of interdisciplinary studies and applied Earth sciences in relation to IUGS financial resources, and 2) a new look at the external and internal scenarios in which IUGS is involved.

In the IUGS the promotion of interdisciplinary studies and applied earth sciences has been focused on scientific issues which have been carried out mainly through different IUGS Commissions and some programs organized with some international partners, as it is the case of UNESCO for the International Geosciences Program (IGCP). However, throughout the years it has become evident that the ability to maintain and expand these activities is strongly limited by the available funds. Thus, the number of Commissions, Task Groups and Joint Programmes has remained quite stable through the years, whilst the IGCP, for many years a flagship of IUGS, has faced a decline in resources, despite an increase in IUGS's contribution.

Most of IUGS resources come from the fees paid by the member countries, an amount that has remained almost constant for the last ten years, except for a slight adjustment, related to the inflation rate. Possibilities for new money sources are limited, and it would be wishful thinking to expect in the next few years a major raise in revenues that IUGS could use to increase substantially its direct support for world wide scientific activities. Thus, IUGS should reinforce indirect actions in such a way that scientific contributions on basic and applied research will result from national and international "grassroots" actions, mainly within the framework provided by the goals, strategies and priorities shared by International organizations such as IUGS, UNESCO, and the International Council for Science (ICSU). These indirect avenues should be developed in well-studied external and internal scenarios.

In the External Scenario of IUGS actions have been mostly restricted to the above-mentioned cooperation with UNESCO or to some programs promoted with other organizations within the ICSU, as exemplified by the International Program on the Lithosphere. There are however a number of other activities and bodies, within and outside UNESCO, offering possibilities, besides the existing ones, for stronger interaction. These include UNESCO activities on education, water and associated ecosystems, and world heritage, and ICSU activities on environment in relation to sustainable development, scientific data and information, and capacity-building in science.

In the Internal Scenario of IUGS the main issue to be considered is the interaction with the National Committees which represent the 120 member countries. Here, communication has mostly been from IUGS to the National Committees, whilst feedback and interaction has been almost non-existent. This situation implies a lack of information about the specific circumstances that geological communities of some countries or regions are facing and a corresponding lack of involvement of IUGS in their activities and problems. This situation needs to be changed. If IUGS is to promote activities that bring together members on common ground, it is necessary to study in depth what they are doing, in order to foster collaboration among them, with Affiliate Organizations, and with National Committees of other international organizations, such as those of UNESCO and ICSU. We should work towards greater efficiency and relevance of activities, reducing existing duplications of functions and efforts. Different missions should be defined for each country and region in the light of their utterly different problems and needs. In relation to inactive countries, IUGS should explore in detail the reasons behind that inactivity and look for possible solutions.

Another important item in IUGS internal scenario is the interaction with the 42 IUGS Affiliated Organizations, which are quite different in

scope and size. Here communication works both ways, but it is mainly restricted on one side to IUGS general circulars and on the other to the reports submitted annually by the affiliated organizations. This situation needs improvement. Representatives of IUGS EC together with representatives of the Affiliate Organizations should discuss in which way they may interact among them and with national and regional geological communities and international organizations.

With regard to IUGS Commission and Task Groups, they mainly respond to specific needs of the international geological community, one of the most important being the establishment and source of information on international standards for the Geological Sciences. This goal and all related activities, as well as those on management and application of geoscience information, should be maintained and reinforced by IUGS.

On the relationship between the International Geological Congress and IUGS, it should be remarked that the IGC was born in 1878 to provide an international forum to the world geological community for reaching consensus on matters related to geological standards, whilst IUGS was born in 1961 in order to bridge the IGC inability to act between Congresses. Thus, IGC and IUGS are supplementary and should work together as both serve as forums to the activities of the world geological community. So, for the next IGC (Australia, 2012), I look forward to working with the Australian Local Organizing Committee, building up a relationship between IUGS and IGC to be the best ever.

With regard to communications and visibility, the Strategic Action Plan has clearly stated that they should be improved as they are essential if the Union is to fulfil its mission, meets its goals, and have any impact whatsoever in the geoscience community and in society at large. In that context, in the year 2001 the IUGS EC launched the initiative of the International Year of the Planet Earth. Since then, the Year has become a reality, has been successfully proclaimed by the United Nations, and gradually has taken on a life of its own, becoming almost a parallel organization to IUGS. Now IUGS should have a permanent follow-up of this project to see in which way its own structure could supplement the Year's actions, especially with regard to one of its original goals, that is, to disseminate the idea that the geosciences and geoscientists are key players for a sound development of our Planet. Furthermore, the IUGS should also be planning on scenarios that are beyond 2010, the year in which the International Year will officially close down, to see in which way the IUGS and the international geological community will capitalize and further the results of this project.

In connection with policies on communication another important item is the IUGS Web Site, which it must be substantially improved in its outlook, linked to the websites—to be established—of National Committees, and used as a meeting ground for the different bodies of the IUGS.

In this overview, I have outlined my ideas about what is necessary to be considered and implemented by the new Executive Committee, in order to continue and reinforce the work done by the outgoing executive. The support and collaboration of the whole IUGS constituency will be essential to maintain and improve IUGS efficiency in attaining these goals.

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