

# African countries to form regional network on global environmental change



**Nairobi** 5 October, 2005 At a historic meeting held in Nairobi last week, scientists from throughout Africa called for a regional network to promote much needed research on environmental degradation in the region.

The aim of the network, initially called AFRICANESS (African Network of Earth System Science), is to provide a regional platform for the study of global environmental change (GEC), the combination of changes that are occurring throughout the world and which are having an impact at the global scale. Climate change is just one of the consequences of GEC.

All countries are affected by GEC but some regions are more vulnerable than others. "The combination of poverty, political instabilities, disease and sensitive ecosystems makes Africa one of the most vulnerable regions in the world," said Professor Eric Odada.

"Environmental degradation does not respect national boundaries. We

need a stronger network of scientists throughout Africa if we are to properly monitor the dramatic changes occurring in the region and provide our governments and out people with the information needed to respond effectively," said Hon. Stephen Kalonzo Musyoka, Kenya Minister for Environment and Natural Resources.

The network will also enable African scientists to speak with a unified voice on issues of serious concern in the region such as desertification and dwindling water resources. By coordinating their efforts they can more easily set collective research agendas and share data.

The network will initially focus on:

- **Water and climatic modelling**
- **Desertification**
- **Land degradation, biodiversity, and food security**
- **Health and pollution**
- **Marine ecosystems**

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“An important aspect of the network will be working with policy makers and social / natural scientists to ensure that the research agenda supports societal and policy needs,” said Professor Sospeter Muhongo, ICSU Regional office for Africa.

An organizing committee with broad regional representation has been established. The next step will be to procure funding for a Secretariat and infrastructure to support the network.

“This really is an important development. Similar networks in Africa have been attempted in the past but this is the first time that scientists from across Africa have been able to come together to discuss openly their needs and find a common way forward,” said Dr. Seko Toure, UNEP Regional Office for Africa.

The meeting was organised by the Earth System Science Partnership (ESSP) and the International Council of Science (ICSU) with support from the US National Science Foundation, the New Partnerships for Africa's

Development (NEPAD) and the National Research Foundation (NRF), South Africa.

The Earth System Science Partnership ([www.essp.org](http://www.essp.org)) is a partnership of four global environmental change programmes: Diversitas, the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP), the International Human Dimensions Programme (IHDP) and the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP). The Pan African Secretariat (PASS), a joint ESSP activity on capacity building, was responsible for the logistical organization of the event.

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