

Speaking notes

My name is Marcos Regis da Silva and I am the Executive Director of the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research, more commonly the IAI. I would like to welcome you to the IAI's *Small Grant Program (SGP): the role of ecosystem services in adaptation to global change for human wellbeing*. This is an exceptionally important initiative and I would like to thank the United States National Science Foundation whose generous support to the IAI made initiatives such as this one possible.

The IAI sits at the intersection of science and policy. Its mandate is to support transdisciplinary and multinational scientific projects on global change and transform resultant data, information and findings into products for use by policy makers. It is for this reason that the IAI invests so much in programs that support innovative science. Simply stated, science, physical, natural and social, is the backbone of the IAI.

In this context, we can understand the IAI as a science based regional inter-governmental organization that provides objective, disinterested and agenda free scientific results generated from projects investigating the challenges of global change. Simply put, the IAI reflects the will of its Parties.

Its mandate, similar to other international/regional intergovernmental organizations or conventions, comes from countries that have ratified the Agreement establishing the IAI. The IAI answers, responds to, follows the directive of its Parties. And countries are sovereign. They, through their electorates, make the decisions. Secretariats are tasked in assisting with the implementation of those decisions.

Decisions to problems arising in a regional or an international context are complicated. Think of the complexity for example of a simple problem such as transboundary pollution between only two countries. Think of the lack of enforcement mechanisms at the regional and global levels. Moreover, technical solutions fare extremely poorly in dynamic, often unstable environments where policy making resides.

That is, the policy making environment is "messy" and differs immensely from the logical hypotheses peer review and testing ecosystem of scientific inquiry. In policy making, scientific evidence is but one element among many other competing, and often better financed, elements.

Adding more to the complexity of the science to policy ecosystem, the social or political challenges for which contributions from science are most needed are often the ones where science is most complex, transdisciplinary and lacking clear-cut answers. Is climate change responsible for the current spate of droughts in many regions of South America and the United States? Well, it's complicated...

So how does a regional intergovernmental organization function in this science to policy ecosystem and what is the role of projects such as the SGP?

First, the Agreement to the IAI provides many mechanisms to promote scientific inquiry, develop and sustain networks of scientific institutions and research centers and involve different actors in the design of transdisciplinary research. I note that the Agreement provides for the establishment of a Scientific Advisory Committee as the principal scientific advisory organ of the Institute. It also calls for the development of an American-wide network of institute research centers and for the designation of affiliated research institutions. All of these mechanisms are axed toward the support of scientific inquiry and reinforce efforts to better understand global changes threatening our livelihoods and communities.

I invite you to read carefully the text of the Agreement which established the IAI and reflect on how modern and forward thinking its objectives are.

These mechanisms available through the Agreement have given the IAI the ability to nurture an exceptional network of scientists from across the Americas of which you may be a member or will soon be welcomed as a member. These networks provide the scientific framework needed by the region to address collaboratively and trans-nationally challenges related to global change. They also inform decision making and policy making at various sub-national levels. The challenge, however, is how to link this exceptional reservoir of scientific knowledge to the national, regional and international policy processes.

Second, international fora, and the IAI Conference of the Parties is an actor in international fora, provides Member Countries with mechanisms to view problems from a regional or an international perspective. Such a broader perspective is important when solutions to a regional or global problem require action beyond those available through national considerations. For example, in the development of projects supported by the IAI, efforts will be made to align scientific inquiry to the frameworks adopted by countries under the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. Or, alternatively, through these frameworks, the IAI is able to contribute needed information in the development of national activities related to sustainable development and adaptive capacity within a regional to global context.

Third, the IAI works through and collaborates with other supranational mechanisms such as the IPCC, IPBES, Multi-lateral environmental agreements and environmental programs and organizations to share the results of its science-based activities and contribute to decisions which filter down to the national level.

I hope these brief comments provide some food for thought in the coming days and with a better understanding of the important role you will have in our work. We are privileged with regard to the wealth of knowledge in this workshop and the potential for original solutions for some purportedly intractable problems.

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in this event, and I look very much forward to the development and implementation of innovative projects on global change.
