



Message from the Director-General

In the past 40 years or so, as a climate scientist, I have devoted myself to research on the Asian monsoon climate, including ecosystem-climate interaction, and anthropogenic impacts on climate. As part of my international activities, I have also been involved in the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Through these academic experiences, I can confidently say that we human beings have been drastically changing our planet by inducing “global warming” of the climate and by degrading eco-systems. Particularly since the late 20th century, the impact of human activities has overwhelmed the entire earth, ushering in a new geologic era called “the Anthropocene”.

Obviously, an essential and urgent challenge for humanity today is how to achieve a harmonious relationship with nature on earth. Since its establishment in 2001, RIHN has been committed to this monumental issue by conducting diverse solution-oriented research under the overarching question of how human-nature interaction and relations *ought* to be. To achieve this mission, RIHN undertakes interdisciplinary research spanning the natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences, and in recent years, has evolved towards transdisciplinary research that involves collaboration with various stakeholders in society.

To effectively promote interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research, in April of 2016 we established a new research structure by introducing three Research Programs, one Core Program, and the RIHN Center. With these new structures in place, we are now pursuing our research through enhanced collaboration within our institute, across the diverse research community, and with society in general. To enhance international activities of RIHN, we are also collaborating with the international research platform Future Earth, which aims to integrate global environmental change research for achieving global sustainability including contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. As part of this, we are hosting Future Earth Asian Regional Centre to strengthen research collaboration and capacity building across the Asian countries.

We are excited to implement these new research initiatives and make progress on solutions to the many environmental challenges we face, including various new issues related to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

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RIHN Philosophy and Approach

For several decades, researchers have attempted to find solutions to the environmental problems that now confront human communities at all scales, but despite extensive research in individual disciplines, many environmental problems have remained unresolved. There is therefore a need to go beyond partial descriptions of discrete environmental problems towards holistic understandings of the underlying causes of these problems and for integrated approaches to their solutions.

The Research Institute for Humanity and Nature is a national research institute established by the Government of Japan in 2001 and it is part of the National Institutes for the Humanities. RIHN research starts from the premise that environmental problems are rooted in human society, culture, and values. The goal of RIHN is to seek concepts, theories and mechanisms capable of describing and enabling transformation of human-environment interactions. This implies that RIHN research involves a normative dimension, driven by questions such as what the relationship between humanity and nature ought to be like. To this end, RIHN solicits, funds, and hosts integrative research projects investigating environmental change problems in specific settings. Research projects are undertaken by interdisciplinary teams at RIHN, partner institutions, and societal stakeholders in Japan and abroad.

We at RIHN believe that research ought to contribute to the search for solutions to real-world problems and, therefore, we promote a co-design and co-production approach where researchers and societal actors join hands in exploring problems and developing new framings and possible solutions. RIHN research is increasingly transdisciplinary in that it seeks to redefine

the role of science in society, improve dialogue between different traditions of knowledge, and stimulate new multi-actor local, national and international collaborations. This approach needs to draw on multiple, diverse perspectives from a range of disciplines including the natural and social sciences, arts and humanities, and engineering and design.

Science cannot be uniformly applied to the world but should instead enable solutions to social-environmental problems that are informed by lived social practices and communal values. RIHN research is developed globally, but with Asia as a core focus area. Not only is Asia's impact on global development increasingly conspicuous, but at the same time it is also home to many examples of long-term cultural-ecological continuity that need to be understood in terms of their own significance to regional dynamics. RIHN research crucially depends on long-established networks in Asia and contributes to transdisciplinary initiatives in the region, among others by hosting the Regional Centre for Future Earth in Asia.

RIHN research is guided by the following three objectives:

- Conduct research that analyzes the interaction between humanity and nature and critically examines the sustainability of human societies, based on past RIHN research and international literature and experiences
- Apply research results to solve real-world sustainability problems
- Promote solution-oriented research on environmental challenges that is co-designed and co-produced in close collaboration with societal stakeholders

While other regions are not excluded, the primary geographical focus of RIHN research is on Asia. More broadly, RIHN strives to deploy an Asian perspective in its research on global environmental change.