

Consolidated EREC Comments on the Programs

One overarching concern cutting across the programs was the observation that the substantive coherence between the programs and their constituent projects is rather limited. The Committee noted that this gap occurs in all programs and concluded that stronger substantive integration is needed. It was suggested that projects are more explicitly developed to align with the main thrust of their programs.

Program 1

The Committee found Program 1 well-structured and progressing well, noticing a partial shift to more contemporary themes as the palaeoclimatological project is now completed and a new Pre-Research Project on air pollution in Northern India is complementing the work on peatland in Indonesia and Eco-disaster risk reduction in Japan. This was seen as both an opportunity and a challenge— the Program is pitched at the long term historical level while the projects are short term, agent-centered. Can locating the projects in the historical context provide some direction for the short term? There appear to be several common aspects to the projects, which suggests that coherence can be built. While noting that the general tension between program theme and project contents is also present in Program 1, the Program Director's efforts to provide direction to the program by embedding the research in the context of Asia's historical development pathway, were well appreciated. The use and further development of the nexus concept – from resource nexus to livelihood nexus – were recognized as important. This was also seen as a good example where analyzing trends and connections may be more fruitful than identifying causalities.

Given the economics background of the Program Director, it was pointed out that, in considering societal transformation and environmental change, the potential of economics has not yet been fully fleshed out: peatland fires and rice stubble burning can both be examined using economics concepts and tools.

The question was asked at what level of society transformation might be realized. The constituent projects are all addressing relatively local issues and are not necessarily very innovative. Therefore, introducing new ideas by providing a wider, international, context is important.