

# UNESCO International Water Conference

## Leveraging intersectorality for sustainable water security and peace

UNESCO HQs, Paris – 13-14 May 2019

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### BACKGROUND

One of the most basic human needs, water is vital to almost all activities, especially those related to food production, energy generation, industry, and land use. Its management and governance affect health, gender equality, education and livelihoods, as well as the environment, making water resources a critical element of sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Although from space satellite imagery show the abundant masses of water that characterize the Earth, less than 1% of those resources accounts for usable fresh water. Competing uses increase pressure on this scarce resource, while global change exacerbates its uneven distribution across space and time. As a result, sustainable access to water resources must face several challenges, related to the management of both demand and supply. However, if water can prove to be a source of tensions, it also constitutes a gift of life that has the ability to unite people and communities, and to foster peace and security.

Indeed, water is recognized as a key element for international cooperation. At the global level, several periods have been dedicated to boosting coordination and collaboration for improved water governance and management, including the International Decade for Action: Water for Life (2005-2015), the International Year of Sanitation (2008), the International Year of Water Cooperation (2013), the International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development (2018–2028). Because water is closely linked to every aspects of development, its governance and management require a careful consideration of the needs of each sectors of the economy and of society, to guarantee the effectiveness and sustainability of decisions taken. In that sense, sustainable water governance should ensure an equitable allocation of water resources through increased cooperation between sectors, while also providing water stakeholders and all citizens, women and men, with equal opportunities for discussion in order to participate in political processes.

In order to address holistically the various challenges of sustainable water governance and management, a change in the societal mindset is needed, through the adoption of a multi- and intersectoral approach. Taking such a crosscutting perspective can fuel our capacity to find efficient and integrated solutions for economic, environmental and social sustainability. Education and learning, as drivers of transformation, play a central role at all levels and in all social contexts. Indeed, they have the ability to boost the transition towards more sustainable water sharing and use, and overall responsible, tolerant and inclusive societies. Similarly, improved water governance should build on gender equality, given that water management is closely linked to gender, reflecting the uneven distribution of tasks between men and women, which exacerbate vulnerabilities and impede female empowerment.

UNESCO's transdisciplinary mandate supports the building of bridges between sectors, in the quest for innovative answers to contemporary challenges. In particular, the Organization's experience and expertise in the fields of Education, Sciences (both natural, and social and human sciences), Culture and Communication allow it to provide sustainable interdisciplinary and intersectoral solutions to issues affecting water governance and management.

For more than 50 years, UNESCO has been active in the field of freshwater, via its International Hydrological Programme (IHP), as well as on ocean via the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC). The IHP has been successful in convening the proactive involvement of Members States on water-related issues, notably by offering interfaces between science and policy for decision-making, and by establishing intergovernmental fora for discussion, in the form of councils, bureaus, or dedicated events such as, most recently, the first Science-Policy

Interface Colloquium on water held in June 2018. This work is supported by other UNESCO programmes that implement water-related activities, such as the International Geosciences Programme (IGCP) in the field of Earth sciences. The latter constitutes a platform bringing together scientists from around the world to advance knowledge in hydrogeology, through various projects. With the upcoming United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), UNESCO, through the IOC, will take the lead on coordinating efforts aiming to reverse the pattern of declining oceans' health and to create better conditions to develop sustainably oceans, seas and coasts.

Drawing upon the recommendations of the Global High-Level Panel for Water and Peace's 2017 Report, the UNESCO International Water Conference will provide a global multi-stakeholder platform for discussion on the subject of water, aiming to foster the adoption of an intersectoral approach in water resources governance and management, including at the transboundary level. In the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goals (the SDGs), the UNESCO International Water Conference will contribute to the enhanced understanding of the connective role of water in all the SDGs.

The UNESCO International Water Conference will promote a cooperative process based on networking and partnerships between stakeholders. This will encourage a broad and concerted commitment, supporting the implementation of a comprehensive response to water governance and sustainable development challenges at the local, national and international levels. In order for the discussion to be effectively operating and for collaboration to grow, participation will be diverse and will include government representatives, policy makers, businesses, international organizations, donors, civil society organizations, scientific community institutions, educators, and the media.

The UNESCO International Water Conference will contribute to the series of water-related events already organized by UNESCO, thus continuing to deepen reflection and exchanges around this resource.

In an inclusive and transversal perspective, all discussions will cover the two UNESCO global priorities, i.e. Africa and Gender Equality. Among other things, discussions will tackle difficulties faced by the African continent in achieving the expected economic growth. They will also look at how African youth (which accounts for more than 60% of the population of the continent) could access more opportunities to participate, not only as a beneficiary but as an influential player, to the development of contextual and creative solutions to water-related issues. Water education and vocational training programmes for youth will also be discussed in relation to labour market forecasts, in order to better meet the needs of African countries in terms of development, and to reduce imbalances between education supply and the water sector demand.

Similarly, the objective will be to demonstrate that integrating gender equality in policies at all levels prove to be a critical element to guarantee all women and men access to water and sanitation. In return, the latter will support the advancement of many other goals of the 2030 Agenda such as access to education and employment. Gender-related norms, customs, stereotypes still prevent women in some regions to participate and contribute to the management of water-resources – particularly regarding decision-making – and to benefit fully from it. Engagement from all, including men and boys, is essential to combat water-related gender discriminations, and to allow women to access decision-making for water management. Engaging in this issue will improve health and hygiene conditions of millions of people, strengthen social inclusion, contribute to poverty eradication, and move forward to environmental sustainability.

Lastly, Small Island developing States will also be at the heart of discussions. As a UNESCO priority group, they face a future whose only certainty is the need to tackle daily water-related challenges. With a history rooted in new and innovative approaches for development, societal mobilization and technological adaptation, those States demonstrate the need for building capacities, bridges and networks to generate effective momentum and impact that are culturally sensitive and scientifically sound.

## OBJECTIVES

The UNESCO International Water Conference aims to:

1. Provide a multi-stakeholder platform for convening a multidisciplinary discussion on the need for an intersectoral approach to the governance and management of water resources, in order to provide economically, socially and environmentally sustainable solutions and contribute to water security and peace;
2. Present and disseminate best practices of mechanisms enabling participation, transparency, and sharing of relevant information, for all stakeholders involved in intersectoral water governance and management, including governmental departments and agencies, private sector bodies, civil society organizations, the scientific community, and international institutions;
3. Illustrate the importance of interdisciplinarity and the integration of sciences within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the objectives of other water-related international agendas including the Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction and the Paris Agreement on climate, to help Member States in reaching them.
4. Launch a Call for Action to foster and embrace interconnectedness in water governance and management and to adopt an intersectoral approach in response to the complexity of water-related challenges. Particular attention will be given to education, broadly understood, as a key factor for strengthening capacities to address water sustainability challenges

The concept note is accompanied by the following annexe:

- Annex 1 – Provisional agenda of the UNESCO International Water Conference.

## Provisional agenda of the UNESCO International Water Conference

Day 1: Monday 13 May			
08:30 - 09:30	Registration of participants		
Opening Ceremony			
09:30 - 11:00	Welcoming remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· UNESCO Director-General</li> <li>· President of the 39<sup>th</sup> session of the UNESCO General Conference</li> </ul> High-level panel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Council of IHP</li> <li>· Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations [TBC]</li> <li>· President of the World Water Council [TBC]</li> </ul>		
11:00 - 11:30	Coffee Break		
Thematic Panels			
11:30 - 13:00	Panel on Water and Technological Innovation	Panel on Water Education for Sustainable Development	Panel on Water and Youth-led Social Change
13:00 - 15:00	Lunch		
15:00 - 16:30	Panel on Water and Heritage	Panel on Data for Water-related Decision-Making	Panel on Water and Gender
16:30 - 17:00	Coffee Break		
17:00 - 18:30	Panel on Global Change and its Effects on Freshwater and Ocean Systems from an SDGs Perspective	Panel on Sustainable Water and Energy [TBC]	
19:00 - 21:30	Performance of the “H2O – Sounds of the Earth” Orchestra Launch of the Water Museums Exhibition – Reception		

Day 2: Tuesday 14 May	
Thematic Panel	
09:30 - 11:00	Panel on Water and Peace
11:00 - 11:30	<i>Coffee Break</i>
High-level Closing Ceremony	
11:30 - 12:30	Closing remarks · <i>UNESCO Director-General</i> Statements · <i>President of the Republic of France [TBC]</i> · <i>President of the Republic of Senegal [TBC]</i>
12:30 - 14:00	<i>Lunch</i>