

International Hydrological Programme

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PROPOSED THEMATIC PROGRAMME ON WATER EDUCATION WITHIN THE UN DECADE ON EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (DESD, 2005-2014)

Item 13.4 of the provisional agenda

SUMMARY

Water education is a very important component of UNESCO's overall effort in water, including within the International Hydrological Programme. The UNESCO Executive Board has called for a UNESCO-wide strategy for water education at all levels. This document reviews the evolution of water education within UNESCO, and draws attention to the Draft Action Plan for the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), which includes 12 Thematic Programmes one of which would be devoted to "Education for Sustainable Water Management". The IHP would be expected to play an important role in such a UNESCO-wide effort for water education.

Decision required: paragraph 16.

1. The Executive Board, at its 166th session, adopted a decision (166 EX/Decision 3.6.1) concerning a proposal for the elaboration of an education programme for the sustainable management of freshwater resources. The decision of the Board emphasizes the importance of water education within UNESCO's overall action related to water. It also draws attention to the need to involve all UNESCO's programme sectors to ensure that all forms and levels of education are included and that UNESCO as a whole has a coherent, integrated policy and strategy in water education. The 174th session of the Board reviewed the evolution of water education within UNESCO as outlined in the paragraphs that follow.

2. Since the early 1990s, UNESCO's action in the field of freshwater, primarily through the International Hydrological Programme, became increasingly oriented towards a sustainable development perspective, and thus considerably broader than the more narrow technical focus on hydrology that had been the norm hitherto, not only in UNESCO but in the field in general. The holistic, integrated approach of sustainable development brought UNESCO and other institutions closer to the reality of water problems on the ground. Addressing these problems in all their complexity became the challenge. UNESCO, with its interdisciplinary mandate, was particularly suited to dealing with water in this perspective. A similar evolution took place in UNESCO's work in water education, always a pillar of the IHP and also of UNESCO's work in environmental education and later in education for sustainable development.

3. In 2001, a significant leap forward occurred when "water and associated ecosystems" was declared a principal priority of the Natural Sciences Sector by the Member States, starting with the Programme and Budget for 2002-2003 (31 C/5). This change in UNESCO was echoed by the rise of water to the top of the political agenda after the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals and after the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. While water education continued to remain an important component of UNESCO's programme, it did not – and still has not – achieved a high profile within the heightened attention to water by the international community.

4. Since 2002, there has been substantial growth and extension of UNESCO's action in freshwater, including in the field of water education. And given the now decidedly interdisciplinary nature of the IHP and other UNESCO programmes related to sustainable development, ties with other UNESCO programme sectors began to strengthen in order to address not only water education, but also issues such as water and culture, the subject of this year's World Water Day for which UNESCO is the lead agency.

5. An event of considerable importance in strengthening UNESCO's prestige, capacity and action in this field was the entry into the Organization in July 2003 of the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education as a Category I institute. Originally a Dutch Institute, UNESCO-IHE has been training water professionals from developing countries for nearly 50 years. It is the only entity in the United Nations system accredited to confer MSc and PhD degrees recognized worldwide. It also delivers water education and capacity building in many other forms including short courses tailored to specific needs and online training. On 9 March 2006 attention was drawn to the strategic importance of UNESCO-IHE in the Organization's work on water at the "Strategic Roundtable on the Future of UNESCO-IHE", convened by the Director-General and the Dutch Minister of Development Cooperation, and attended by permanent delegates and observers to UNESCO.

6. While UNESCO-IHE focuses primarily on tertiary education, the resources and training it offers are highly relevant for water education at all levels and in all forms. UNESCO has long maintained that education and public awareness about water and other environment and sustainable development issues needs to draw heavily on the latest scientific knowledge. This is of particular concern as it is widely acknowledged that there is a

gap of some 10 years or more between the emergence of such new knowledge and the integration of that knowledge into educational programmes especially at primary and secondary levels. The “knowledge gap” between the worlds of science and education is therefore an important constraint to providing quality education for sustainable development. UNESCO is perhaps uniquely placed to try to bridge this gap since its mandate spans both domains. The role of UNESCO-IHE and indeed of the International Hydrological Programme and the World Water Assessment Programme is therefore considered within UNESCO to be vital for water education as a whole.

7. Since the 166th session of the Executive Board, a multitude of activities in freshwater education at all levels have been implemented by UNESCO, both by Headquarters and by Field Offices. Many of these activities have been undertaken by sectors working together, especially the Education and Science Sectors. At present, there is, however, no distinct “programme” for water education within UNESCO. Within the structure of UNESCO’s Programme and Budget, water education is imbedded in several parts, in particular in sub-programmes I.3.1 and II.2.1.

8. The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), for which UNESCO serves as lead agency within the UN system, provides a new and forward looking framework for intersectoral cooperation, and notably for water education. It was in December 2002 that the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 57/254 proclaiming the Decade to run from 2005-2014. UNESCO was designated as the lead agency and requested to develop a draft International Implementation Scheme for the Decade. This was developed through extensive consultation with partners and approved at the October 2004 General Assembly in Resolution 59/237.

9. UNESCO has two related roles as Lead Agency for the DESD. The first is a leadership role vis-à-vis the myriad potential actors striving to implement its goals. The second is as a substantive implementer of the Decade, helping to create an enabling environment for the achievement of the objectives of the DESD.

10. At present the Organization is developing its own programme of implementation for the DESD. A Draft Action Plan has been prepared drawing heavily on input from all the programme sectors. This draft is currently undergoing internal review within the secretariat. Of particular relevance is the proposal that 12 Thematic Programmes be created, including one on “Education for Sustainable Water Management”, which would cover all levels of both formal and non-formal education. If approved, this Thematic Programme would provide the substantive and operational framework for reinforcing and broadening the intersectoral cooperation for water education achieved thus far.

11. The Draft Action Plan suggests that the Science Sector of UNESCO, i.e. the IHP, would have the lead responsibility for this programme on water education, to which other sectors would contribute, presumably especially as regards primary and secondary education as well as public awareness and other non-formal education.

12. The Draft Action Plan is likely include many elements which would address the concerns reflected in 166 EX/Decision 3.6.1, including:

- A clear and agreed *vision* and *mission*.
- Key audiences or *thrusts* of Education for Sustainable Development
- *Objectives* that UNESCO will help Member States to achieve through this Action Plan
- *Principles* to guide the development and implementation of the programmes under the Action Plan

- *Thematic Programmes* through which UNESCO would help create the enabling environment and capacity of Member States and other stakeholders to achieve the objectives of the DESD.
- *Targets* derived from the objectives and thrusts of the DESD International Implementation Scheme
- *Milestones* specified at a biennial level to guide preparation of the C/5
- Organizational structures to catalyze intersectoral coordination and collaboration
- A diverse range of *partners* who will participate in and support DESD Thematic Programmes
- *Research* which provides the knowledge upon which continued programme planning can take place
- *Monitoring* and *Evaluation* as a continuous process throughout the DESD, with a focus on a mid-Decade review in 2009-2010 and a final evaluation in 2014.

13. Therefore it is the DESD that is likely to provide a new strategic and operational framework for developing a UNESCO-wide effort in water education that would bind together in a more coherent and coordinated whole the already significant work being undertaken primarily by the Science and Education sectors, but also by other programme sectors.

14. A UNESCO Action Plan for implementing the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is being completed and will be approved by the Intersectoral Working Group (IWG) set up by DG Blue Note (DG/Note/05/34 of 29 July 2005) on DESD Implementation. It will then be necessary to reflect this Plan in the Draft 34 C/5 and in the next Medium-Term Plan for consideration by the Member States.

15. A related initiative is the proposal under consideration for developing a cross-sectoral capacity-building programme within UNESCO. This subject was first considered by UNESCO's Executive Board at its 171st session (171 EX/Decision 59), and more recently at its 174th session (ref. 174/EX/16). Such a programme is likely to include a significant element on water.

16. The Bureau examined these two proposals for water education within UNESCO, and their implications for the IHP. The Bureau decided to recommend that the Intergovernmental Council set up a working group of experts to:

- advise and guide UNESCO's work in this context, with regard to water education and capacity building,
- review the draft thematic programmes for the DESD as they are drawn up to ensure that they are scientifically sound, and that they mesh with the strategic planning and programme implementation underway within the IHP and UNESCO-IHE,
- help engage all the relevant actors engaged in UNESCO's water programme, including IHP National Committees and water-related centers, both category I and II.

The Council may wish to adopt this recommendation and determine how to set up the working group of experts.