UNESCO input for the UN 26 water conference Themes

Raising the Profile of Science for Sustainable Water Management and Peace

Science holds a unique position in the world as an apolitical approach to defining and approaching problems. The future of the hydrologic cycle is uncertain and non-stationary, and this uncertainty cascades to all ecosystems and societies. A global scientific framework focused on question development and hypothesis testing is thus essential to unify our understanding of water on earth for a peaceful and prosperous future.

UNESCO suggests the need to raise the profile of science in water management as earlier on emphasized during the UN 2023 Water Conference in New York. Transformative scientific breakthroughs define new eras for growth and understanding. Science-based approaches are crucial for solving interconnected and complex water challenges. By leveraging validated scientific assessments and policies, stakeholders can make informed decisions that ensure sustainable water management and address global water security issues. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of water dynamics, promotes innovative solutions, and enhances collaboration among scientists, policymakers, and communities.

Considering UNESCO's mandate on science and the UNESCO's Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP) strategic plan, currently in its ninth phase (IHP-IX) focusing on "**Science for a Water Secure World in a Changing Environment**," UNESCO's IHP plays a crucial role in promoting science-based water solutions within the UN system. At the UN 2026 Water Conference, UNESCO suggests accelerated efforts by advocating for science-based water solutions, enhancing evidence-based decision-making. IHP-IX could lead and demonstrate this effort following its focus on five priority areas: advancing hydrological knowledge, water education, bridging the data-knowledge gap, integrated water resources management, and science-based water governance. Emphasizing science in water management, as highlighted during the UN 2023 Water Conference, is essential for effectively addressing complex global water challenges.

Enhance efforts to filling capacity gap for water solutions

To continue the efforts and action on capacity building based on UN 2023 Water Conference through Capacity Development Initiative (CDI), established in March 2021 by UN-Water as a response to the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, launched in 2020 by the UN Secretary-General. The CDI is coordinated by UNESCO and UNDESA in collaboration with 38 initiative members from UN Agencies and UN-Water partners. The Initiative is demand-driven, responds to specific countries' capacity development needs by facilitating support from the UN system and other development partners, and encourages national-level ownership.

Raising the Profile of Groundwater and Cooperation

In the framework of the Interactive Dialogue theme 4, "**Water for Cooperation: Transboundary and International Water Cooperation, Cross-Sectoral Cooperation, Including Scientific Cooperation, and Water Across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**," from the UN 2023 Water Conference, remains highly relevant and should be included in the 2026 UN

Water Conference programme. UNESCO suggests an adjustment of this theme to place a stronger emphasis on groundwater and transboundary aquifers. Continued efforts through the work of the Transboundary Water Cooperation Coalition (TWCC), of which UNESCO is a steering committee member along with other partners, are essential to achieving this goal.

Raising the Profile of the Impacts of Climate Change on the Cryosphere and Water

In the framework of the Interactive Dialogue theme 3, "**Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment: Source to Sea, Biodiversity, Climate, Resilience and Disaster Risk Reduction**," from the UN 2023 Water Conference, remains highly relevant and should be included in the 2026 UN Water Conference programme. UNESCO suggests adjustment of them to include the impacts of climate change on the cryosphere and the resulting water-related disasters. Addressing the urgent challenges posed by glacier melting is crucial. Jointly raising global awareness about the critical role glaciers play in the climate system and freshwater supply is essential, emphasizing the need for immediate action on the cryosphere. Promoting action on the cryosphere to ensure water security for millions and protect vital ecosystems is paramount. This effort advanced through the International Year of Glacier Preservation 2025 (UN GA Resolution A/RES/77/158) and the Decade of Action on Cryospheric Sciences 2025-2034, as declared by the UN General Assembly, underscores the urgency of these efforts.

The UN World Water Development Report 2026 and mainstreaming gender in water management

The 2026 edition of the United Nations World Water Development Report (UN WWDR 2026) focusing on '**Water and Gender"** developed by UNESCO's World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP) in collaboration with other UN agencies, to be discussed during the UN 2026 Water Conference. A call to action to accelerate efforts to mainstreaming gender in water management based on the **WWAP Gender toolkit** to be emphasised. Call for Action initiative to raise awareness, dismantle stereotypes, promote women's empowerment and urge government institutions and funding agencies to commit concrete support to advance gender equality in the water domain.