

Review of the IX IHP-Strategy 2nd draft - General comments and proposals

The IHP secretariat has launched a consultation on the IX IHP-Strategy 2nd draft. Comments are expected for the 23rd, November.

During the last General Conference in 2019, Member States asked the IHP to focus on its organizational mandate and clear scientific mission, to ensure its integration into and the coherence of its activities within the UN system and recall their willingness for de-politicization of water issues. However, within the framework of elaborating the IXth Phase of the IHP, the new President of IHP has unilaterally set new core orientations for the IHP which are based on hydrodiplomacy and conflict mediation, the water-energy-food-nexus and transboundary water management. Additionally, he intends to broaden the mandate of the IHP with regard to the UN systems task of delivering on SDG 6 and its targets. The IX IHP-Strategy 2nd draft is based on 2 strategic objectives “Improving evidence-based water management and governance” and “Enhancing resilience of societies under global change including climate change” which are declined in the 3 outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Enhanced capacity development and public awareness towards a sustainable water culture and water management
- Outcome 2: Water-related data and knowledge gaps bridged by enhancing scientific research and cooperation
- Outcome 3: Enhanced evidence-based water-decisions for resilient societies by reinforcing the science-policy interface
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The 2nd draft of the IX-IHP Strategy for the 2022-2029 periods is driving IHP far beyond its mandate through new objectives concerning diplomacy, policy advice for decision-makers beyond its scientific mission and overlapping with the mandate of other UN agencies also working on freshwater, putting at risk the coordination and the efficiency of the global actions in the water sector.

1°/ General comment on the structure of the 2nd draft

Generally speaking, the structure of the first part of the document is not easy to follow and contains approximations. It mixes objectives, elements of context, expected result as well as new competencies. The document is highly repetitive between its different chapters and duplicating one another. Some words are mentioned to an excessive degree : 145 times for the word “data”, as well as some concepts (80 times for water governance). The only table provided is not easily understandable. Most chapters are confusing, without a red thread and the foreseen mandate for the IHP is confusing when somehow mentioned. Some activities are ancient and have had no activities since 2003 or 2007. It is not sure there is material to revive them.

It should be streamlined, shortened by half and only tasks within the mandate of the UNESCO IHP should be kept.

The structure could be simplified by:

- improving the distinction between issues, outcomes and the 5 priorities – further graphics and illustrations can support the theory of change.
- including the rationale of the strategic orientations of IHP-UNESCO: the objective of the first part, called “challenges and perspectives” mixes elements of context, issues, as well as objectives of the IHP Strategy whereas the rationale of these objectives in regards of the mandate of the IHP-UNESCO has not been exposed. This first part will gain clarity by distinguished between the challenges and the rationale of the IHP strategic orientation in regards of its mandate.
- clearly detailing the tools and activities expected to reach these objectives as it is a prerequisite for Member States to understand and assess the strategy.

- better defining the target beneficiary of the actions of the IHP: the term “public” is employed often without precision. Is it the large public? the specialized institutions? The governments ?

Also, the introduction of concepts like “hydro-sociology”, “hydro-informatics” or “hydro-diplomacy” is from our point of view not necessary and induces a focus on the concept more than on the concrete and operative tools. Then the strategy would be strengthened by emphasizing precisely which tools or means (existing and new one) will be use to strengthen the role of social sciences, which is crucial to deal with water issues.

On the contrary, the part concerning the priorities areas is very clear and easy to read.

The whole question of resources is crucial. Does UNESCO have the resources or think it will get them to embark on the social, economic and ecological aspects of hydrology?

2°/ Content of the 2nd draft of the IXth IHP-Strategy (2022-2029) : comments and proposals

Since the last Strategic Plan 2014-2021, the water world and the UN water organizations have moved on. It seems that UNESCO has not taken all the new developments on board.

- Improving water governance

Comments: the 2nd draft focuses on water management and water governance. This second topic refers to institutional and legal frameworks, which is far beyond the IHP’s mandate, and the contribution of IHP on it remains unclear (see p. 10 Result 1).

Proposal: Instead of referring to water governance as a general concept which implies many diverse fields of intervention, it may be more accurate to precise the role of IHP in making available to member states and institutions, tools and means that allow the effective appropriation of scientific data and scenario for evidence-based decision making and increased accountability.

- Hydro-diplomacy

Comment: the strategy refers to hydro-diplomacy and conflict management and negotiation on several occasions. Also, the expected result 5.6 p.36 expresses a clear ambition to intervene in the field of conflict mediation and negotiation. It is important to underline that the IHP is not an actor of the diplomacy of water, which goes far beyond its scientific mandate. Integrating water diplomacy and conflict management into the strategy will ultimately lead i) to the politicization of the water issues, which is precisely the opposite of the program’s goal and ii) undermine already existing conflict management mechanisms. In addition, IHP does not have vocation to advise decision-makers or governments in building institutional governance of the sector but to build capacities through operative tools and innovation that can help better water management and decision process.

In addition, the IHP has not vocation to mobilize “political” knowledge or sciences, contrarily to what is stated in the description of the Mission (point b) p.9).

Proposal: There is a real need for better understanding of water issues and broader access to scientific data in the water sector. IHP, as a scientific program, can bring great contribution by focusing on the scientific issues like groundwater and aquifer conservation and management and delivering / informing / teaching data generation and operative tools for local operators and member states. Also the strategy could deepen how and on which precise topics, IHP could accompany and go with the

operators and institutions to improve freshwater management, preservation and uses particularly against the backdrop of rising water demands and a changing climate.

Rather than expanding its scope beyond its mandate, the IHP should further capitalize on and strengthen its recognized niches, such as groundwater: UNESCO is the only UN organization that deals with groundwater, topic which is regrettably never highlighted in this new strategy.

- **Coordination with other UN Agencies and nexus approach in the 2nd draft strategy**

Comments: the 2nd draft proposes to deal with numerous issues. However some of the topics and outcomes mentioned are already under the mandate of other UN Agencies such as WMO, UNECE (Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes), UNEP, UNISDR, CBD, or the Ramsar Convention on wetlands.

In order to ensure the efficiency of the UN system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda, the IHP needs to respect its own mandate and that of other UN organizations, funds and programmes and should seek close cooperation wherever the establishment of synergies to activities of other UN organisms is possible, such as :

- transboundary cooperation : falls under the global Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Helsinki Water Convention). However, the current wording on p.7: *“Education can likewise foster development of international frameworks and institutional cooperation. Catalysing international agreements for natural resource issues is difficult to achieve but can benefit from the input of the IHP experience, especially in transboundary water bodies, comprehensive water management planning, and water conflict negotiations.”* clearly denies the existence and the role of the Water Conventions, which is not acceptable for a strategy of a UN organization such as the UNESCO IHP. It is shocking to see that the co-lead organization with UNESCO on the indicator 6.5.2, i.e. The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes is not even mentioned! However IHP could contribute to the water convention’s actions through clear partnership (cf. p.33).

In addition, the strategy focuses on the implementation of the water-food-energy nexus (p.7). If this approach is interesting, it involves more institutions than IHP. Also, this approach can only be effectively set up if the other actors and organizations, most notably of the UN development system, are involved from the beginning.

Proposal: The complexity and the interdependency of the water issues impose to set a holistic and inclusive approach as the draft recalls. In order to avoid overlapping and guarantee the efficiency of the actions in the UN system, the strategy of the IHP should focus on the specialization of the IHP and would gained in strength by detailing partnerships with other UN agencies on specific topic. For example, the “governance partnership” in the transboundary water could be implemented with the Water Convention and should involve the use of the existing tools.

Also, it could be interesting to know if other institutions have been approached to implement this nexus, and to precise how concretely it will be implemented.

IHP-UNESCO benefits from a great expertise in hydrological cycles, ecohydrology and groundwater which are strong comparative advantages of the IHP. Regarding the need for an integrative approach, and the necessity to improve the understanding of the existing interdependency between water, climate, biodiversity and ecosystem, the strategy could be more detailed on these topics and how it

plans to work on specific issues with other UN agencies (like the partnership with the UNEP – GEMS/EAU).

Partnerships with other UN Agencies should be detailed p.18 (Innovation and Partnership). UN-Water is mentioned without much detail. It is also well documented that UNESCO did not cooperate well with UN Water members during the last Strategic plan period. UNESCO is pretending it has a unique global water network with the World Water Assessment Report, while it is actually a UN report of all agencies (UNESCO is merely the coordinator). It is impossible to know which are the partner organizations of UNESCO. The added value of the IHP does not come out. It is not enough to mention the UNESCO family and the national committees. It is about how UNESCO IHP can add value to the water research and education.

- **Integration in the UN system reform**

The current reform of the UN system is based on the objective of strengthening the adequacy of the UN system to deliver on Member states' needs in achieving the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. It implies a much more pronounced alignment on specific country needs and the development of processes and mechanisms to adapt UN programs and ensure their flexibility according to local needs.

It's important that IHP IX precisely outlines (p.8) how this objective will be implemented through its new strategy. A clearer framing of how the IHP's strategy will contribute to the Agenda 2030 is necessary: simply mentioned SDG 6 is not sufficient, notably since UNESCO-IHP is not responsible – and cannot be expected to be ! – for the entire water goal.

- **The paradigm of valuing water resources**

Comment: The present draft strategy defines its mission, among other things as “supporting Member States in better [...] valuing [...] their water resources (P.5, p.9 (Mission e.), p.12). It makes a direct link between the economic value of water and the availability of water resources. However, the concept is highly ambiguous and we do not share the strategy's conclusions and suggestions with regard to this paradigm. From our point of view, the main constraint in water use efficiency and the prevention of water scarcity is not the use of water by domestic users, which does not represent more than 10% of the withdrawal globally, but the water use of other sectors (most notably agriculture, industries and energy) which have a very strong impact on the availability and quality of the resource. In turn, the applicability of water market mechanisms need to be assessed carefully and on a case by case basis in order to not limit the access of the poor and other vulnerable groups to the resource and to ensure that no one is left behind. Focusing on public sensitization exclusively implies the risk to move the responsibility of better water management from the government to the public and undermines efforts for efficient regulation of water use as well as other aspects of water governance.

Proposal: It could have greater impact to focus the sensitization on other sectors, and provide tools to build cross-sectoral water management with a clear focus on pro-poor and human rights approaches. We therefore suggest to replace the ambiguous notion of “valuing water resources” with more explicit formulations on the protection of water resources and the promotion of water use efficiency. It is important to acknowledge in this regard, already existing activities of the UN system, i.e. the activities implemented by UNEP.