

WORKSHOP REPORT

# Developing a Water Education Indicator

Delft, 1 July 2025



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This workshop report provides an overview of the discussions and conclusions of the workshop “Developing a Water Education Indicator”, which took place on 1 July 2025 in Delft, the Netherlands. The workshop was convened by the Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme of UNESCO, IHE Delft and supported by the Netherlands UNESCO WMO Water Committee. It was held in conjunction with the 7<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Knowledge and Capacity for the Water Sector.

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## SUMMARY

A Water Education Indicator is essential to help water management organizations to assess (future) water education and capacity development needs, to develop strategies on how to address potential gaps, and to be able to measure progress and constraints in specific dimensions related to water education. Moreover, it draws more (political) attention to the importance of water education and capacity development in general. These were the main conclusions of a Water Education Indicator workshop, organized on 1 July in Delft, the Netherlands, led by IHE Delft, UNESCO IHP and Cap-Net.

The workshop took place in connection with IHE Delft's 7<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Knowledge and Capacity Development for the Water Sector. Experts from various organizations working on water education, SDG6 related monitoring, or a combination of both, were able to attend in-person and online to discuss the added value of an indicator. Methodological challenges and ways to influence the political process regarding a post-2030 sustainable development framework were extensively discussed.

Member States of UNESCO IHP have recognized the absence of a water education indicator as a gap in the 2030 Agenda, especially in relation to the Means of Implementation aspect related to target 6.a. Steps have been taken to better define how the indicator would look like, and to develop supporting data collection methodologies. The latest mandate of UNESCO to work on this topic has been expressed in Article 114 in the IHP-IX Strategic Plan ([link](#)), approved by Member States in 2022. The Article requests the Secretariat of UNESCO IHP to "pursue in cooperation with WHO, UNEP and OECD the development and use of a water education-related indicator under SDG target 6a."

The following additional conclusions as well as next steps were discussed:

- Frame the indicator activity under the umbrella of the UN System Wide Strategy and in particular the PCA concerning the post 2030 agenda.
- Develop a solid narrative around the indicator explaining the urgency and impact of the indicator.
- Develop a roadmap clarifying next steps to move from the initial studies towards a clear definition of the indicator and its importance, including methods of measuring progress.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

**UNESCO, IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, Cap-Net and the Netherlands UNESCO WMO Water Committee (NUWWC) held a workshop on 1 July 2025, with the objective of advancing the development of a water education indicator, including a Roadmap and in connection with post-2030 Agenda political processes.**

This workshop brought together leading experts and stakeholders related to water education from UNESCO, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), IHE Delft, Cap-Net, UN-Water, other UNESCO Water Family members, and other stakeholders including from outside the water sector. Building upon previous initiatives and pilot studies conducted in Gabon, Uruguay, Italy and Malaysia, the event aims to establish robust methodologies for monitoring and evaluating water education on a global scale.

The workshop featured expert presentations from global and national water education specialists, interactive breakout sessions, and collaborative discussions focusing on both methodological approaches and policy implications. Through dedicated sessions, participants explored technical aspects of indicator development and examined the broader policy context. The discussion aimed at shaping the future of water education monitoring, its implementation across member states, and its crucial role in the post-2030 development agenda.

### Justification

On 28 July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the achievement of all human rights. Water is a connector to all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to other global commitments<sup>1</sup>. On July 2020, the United Nations and partners launched the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework, which has capacity development, with focus on human capacity, as one of its specific accelerators<sup>2</sup>. Within SDG 6 ("to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all"), target 6.a calls for the expansion of "international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies."

Sufficient national capacities, both at the human and institutional levels, constitute a prerequisite: i) to promote that right-holders may exercise their water rights and that duty-bearers may fulfil their obligations to ensure that water rights are respected, ii) to give sustainability to the achievements of SDG 6 targets, iii) to successfully conduct the International Decade for Action "Water for Sustainable Development" (2018-2028), and iv) to deliver fast results at an increased scale as promoted by the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework, which is part of the UN Secretary-General's Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs by 2030. Presently, there is no global tool to assess the human capacities of the water sector at the national level.

<sup>1</sup> Including e.g. the Paris Agreement within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the New Urban Agenda.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO and UN DESA have been designated as the coordinators of the newly launched UN-Water Capacity Development Initiative linked to the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework.

The need to establish a new indicator on water education was addressed during the 56<sup>th</sup> Session of the Bureau of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP) in February 2018. Member State representatives noted that in many countries the critical mass of adequately trained human resources able to study, sustainably manage and develop freshwater systems was lacking. The need to establish a new indicator on water education was addressed during the 56<sup>th</sup> Session of the Bureau of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP) in February 2018. Member State representatives noted that in many countries the critical mass of adequately trained human resources able to study, sustainably manage and develop freshwater systems was lacking.

IHP Council Resolution XXIII-8 was adopted in June 2018, titled "IHP support to Member States towards the proposal for a new sustainable development goal indicator 6.a.2 on Water Education," and requested the IHP Secretariat to start developing a methodology (see text box).

**RESOLUTION XXIII-8 OF THE IHP COUNCIL (2018)**

The IHP Council REQUESTS the IHP Secretariat to start developing a methodology, in cooperation with OECD, WHO, and UNEP, for an effective indicator on water education, within IHP-VIII Theme 6 "Water Education, Key for Water Security", in coordination with the UNESCO Water Family, in view of potential submission to the IAEG-SDGs as a new SDG indicator, or as a substantial contribution to the 2030 Agenda.

The new indicator would be a general indicator in the context of the 2030 Agenda and beyond, rather than exclusively restricted to SDG 6. For target 6.a of SDG 6<sup>3</sup>, there already exists an indicator assessing "international cooperation... to developing countries"<sup>4</sup>. The specific component of "international... capacity-building support to developing countries" of target 6.a is not being monitored by the existing set of indicators of the 2030 Agenda.

In 2022, by approving the ninth phase of the Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme's Strategic Plan, members of the IHP Council reaffirmed their call to the IHP Secretariat of UNESCO to lead next steps.

**ARTICLE 114 IN THE IHP-IX STRATEGIC PLAN (2022)**

Additionally, the Member States of the IHP recognizing a gap in the 2030 Agenda, have requested the Secretariat to pursue in cooperation with WHO, UNEP and OECD the development and use of a water education-related indicator under target 6a.

To date, the IHP Secretariat has been working with members of the UNESCO Water Family on the development of methodologies for a water education indicator. The 1st Water Education Indicator Workshop was organized in 2019 in Delft. Following the workshop, two task forces were established in order to work on a dedicated indicator on water education. The 2nd Water Education Indicator Workshop was organized in 2025, as follow up from the previous workshop.

<sup>3</sup> By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies.

<sup>4</sup> Indicator 6.a.1: "Amount of water- and sanitation-related Official Development Assistance that is part of a government-coordinated spending plan".

**Timeline key steps and events**

In line with the discussions of the IHP Bureau and Council sessions in 2018 and with the above-mentioned Council Resolution, a number of events addressing the general background for the new indicator and presenting initial ideas for its development were held in that year. Some of the documents mentioned below are included in Surfdrive (see Annex 1).

- Exploring new data for SMART monitoring of water SDG targets [\(link\)](#)
- GEMI (Global Expanded Monitoring Initiative) Proof of Concept of SDG6 monitoring in six pilot countries [\(link\)](#)
- 56<sup>th</sup> session of the IHP Bureau/23<sup>rd</sup> session of the IHP Council, 2018 [\(link\)](#)
- Adoption: Resolution XXIII-8 during the 23<sup>rd</sup> IHP Council in Paris, June 2018 [\(link\)](#)
- First International Conference of the Dushanbe Water Process in Tajikistan, June 2018
- High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York, July 2018
- 11<sup>th</sup> OECD Water Governance Initiative Meeting in Zaragoza, November 2018
- Water Education Indicator workshop in Delft, September 2018 [\(link\)](#)
- Developing country case studies Gabon, Uruguay, Italy, Malaysia
- Letter to nominate Member State focal points for this indicator, IHP Secretariat, 2021
- Adoption: Article 114 in the IHP-IX Strategic Plan in Paris, June 2022 [\(link\)](#)
- Water Education Indicator aligned with post-2030 Agenda workshop in Delft, July 2025



## PRESENTATIONS: SUMMARIES AND KEY MESSAGES

### Opening remarks by Mr Gaetano Casale

As host of the workshop, Gaetano Casale (Liaison Office and focal point UN Water Family collaboration) provides a short introduction of IHE Delft. He also explains why this indicator is not only of interest but of huge importance, when aiming to reach SDG6 (and any future sustainable development framework). As the only international institution dedicated to water education, and UNESCO C2C, IHE Delft aims to play a key role in advancing the development of a water education indicator.

### Presentation by Ms Rahmah Elfithri

As Chief of UNESCO's Capacity Development and Water Family Coordination Section, Rahmah Elfithri explains the background and recent efforts regarding advancing a water education indicator. 2018 was an essential moment, as members of the IHP Council recognized the need for a water education indicator through an adopted Resolution. Since then, member states have requested UNESCO IHP, through its IHP-IX Strategic Plan, to lead next steps. The development of the indicator is one of the key activities under the IHP-IX Water Education priority area.

### Statement by Mr Graham Jewitt

IHE Delft Vice Rector Graham Jewitt welcomes the participants and shares examples on how water education plays a key role in contributing to environmental sustainability and possibly the post-2030 framework. Many of these topics will also be discussed during the 7<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Knowledge and Capacity Development, taking place on July 2-4 at the institute. Referring to the IHP Anniversary event in June 2025, it is important to engage the next generation of students in these developments.

### Statement by Mr Martijn van Staveren

Martijn van Staveren, representing the Netherlands UNESCO WMO Water Committee, applauds UNESCO IHP's and IHE Delft's efforts in advancing the development of the indicator, as requested by UN member states in the IHP-IX Strategic Plan. The Netherlands has been active on the topic of SDG6 related monitoring (e.g. via the GEMI SDG6 Proof of Concept Workshop; [link](#)) and this workshop is a step forward to drive discussions about water education monitoring. Supported by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, the Netherlands is willing to serve as a pilot country for new SDG6 related monitoring frameworks or indicators, as it was in the mid-2010s for the GEMI initiative, and is happy to report back on this to the 27<sup>th</sup> IHP Council.

### Presentation by Mr Damian Indij

Cap-Net contributed to the previous Water Education Indicator workshop in 2018. Damian summarizes some of the key recommendations from the event:

- Capacity development should be seen as a dynamic system – don't focus on water education and training alone, as water professionals obtain their expertise in various ways;
- A water education indicator should be formulated in such a way that it is helpful to policy makers to develop and implement national policies regarding water capacity development, as well as being able to measure the impact of their efforts;
- Methodologically, the framework should be applicable across the globe;
- Assess national level, e.g. regarding the existence of a national capacity development plan, but also analyze opportunities for international collaboration and knowledge exchange.

### Presentation by Mr Giuseppe Arduino

Giuseppe Arduino, former UNESCO IHP Chief of Section and currently affiliated to the UNESCO Chair at the University of Algarve, Portugal. He refers to earlier efforts to develop a methodology to assess the "proportion of higher and technical-tertiary education graduates who have received at least the minimum recognized and organized formation required to be researchers, planners, managers and decision-makers in the water and sanitation sector in a given country." Even though this is just one aspect of assessing water education as a whole, this methodology has been a start to assess higher and tertiary level graduate numbers. The methodology was further developed in interaction with institutes in Gabon, Italy, Uruguay and Malaysia.

### Presentation by Ms Chiara Biscarini

Chiara Biscarini, UNESCO Chair at the Università per Stranieri di Perugia starts by stating that 78% of the jobs constituting the global work force are water-dependent. In their methodology, they have been able to calculate, based on the UNESCO Hydrology Thesaurus classification, percentages and numbers of graduates of water-related studies against other studies, on national level for a few countries. She also refers to the World Water Development Report 2016, on Water and Jobs.

### Presentation by Ms Marina Takane

The Means of Implementation (underlined by SDG 6 targets 6.a and 6.b) is a framework, adopted by Member States as part of the 2030 Agenda, of cross-cutting activities that create the 'enabling environment' to achieve the SDGs. It consists of, for example, capacity development related activities, financial resources allocation and integration of regional efforts. Marina Takane from WHO and in particular representing the GLAAS programme jointly implemented by WHO and UNICEF, explains how such activities listed under SDG 6.a and 6.b plus their associated indicators could be integrated in a post-2030 framework. One of many recommendations highlighted in the recent Mol White Paper is to communicate the 'bigger picture' of the need of Mol activities and the associated monitoring procedures.

**Presentation by Mr Joakim Harlin**

Joakim Harlin from UNEP, leading the Priority Collective Action (PCA) 1.2, "Water beyond 2030.", explained the aim and goals of the PCA, which is closely related to the topic of the workshop. The water sector has been privileged to have 'its own' dedicated SDG. Even though this comes with obligations and challenges regarding capacity needs to report on SDG progress, it has been a way to put the sector in the spotlight. Key remarks:

- There are critical voices regarding the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of efforts, and in general the relevance of SDG6 to other SDGs and the 2030 Agenda at large;
- Water education can be seen as a Means of Implementation, along the same lines as financial resources, technological development, etc and is only one part of capacity building;
- Align efforts, develop a 'proof of concept' which could fit a future framework, and be ready.

**Presentation by Ms Nicola Chopin**

Nicola Chopin (University of Saskatchewan) explains the background and approach followed in the MECCE (Monitoring and Evaluation Climate Communication and Education) project. MECCE intended to develop indicators for the extent to which Climate Communication and Education are present in various levels of education (from non-formal to higher education) as well as in the public domain (from public awareness to information accessibility). The project has developed indicators and several country level data sets. Highlighted example, UNESCO commissioned studies conducted on greening education policy. This Greening Curriculum Indicator was adopted as Global Indicator for 4.7.1b and Thematic Indicator for 4.7.3. The MECCE project is a great example from outside the water sector that could support the future work around the indicator.

## BREAKOUTS SESSIONS: SUMMARY AND KEY MESSAGES

**Methodological aspects**

The group raised and discussed the following points of attention:

- What we measure should be considered means to an end. Measure the extent of water education, assess possible (future) gaps in the workforce, and provide actionable advice for e.g. national policy makers or educational institutes.
- Reflecting a comment in plenary, consider the inflow (from other sectors or specializations) and outflow (formally trained water professionals assuming jobs in another sector) of work force. Related, it was suggested to 'follow' water professionals through their career, e.g. via professional associations (e.g. IAHR)
- It is essential to have some standardized, uniform classifications of datasets, education programmes and other elements, underlying the methodological work on an indicator. Reference was made to the UNESCO Thesaurus ([link](#)) and the ISCED classification of higher education. Collecting data also comes with uncertainty – how do we make sure we will have an accurate application and representation, across multiple countries or regions.
- The suggestion was made to schedule an additional online dedicated session, make a compilation of available (and maybe needed) datasets and methodologies (University of Perugia, another by the University of Perugia and Uruguay), and benefit from experiences with testing these methodologies.
- AI could help to assess job postings and collect information about e.g. popular skills or capacities requested in job adverts.
- From Member States, the Netherlands was represented, but it was mentioned to also involve other member states in the discussion. Also the UN Statistics Division UNESCO Institute of Statistics should be involved. Labor organizations?
- A systems/network perspective was mentioned. A graduating group of formally 'identified' water professionals is just one group. Other groups might have their own training programmes, and what about in/outflow and self-learning.
- We should start with a general definition of an indicator.
- Don't go with ideas, go with case studies, a proposed 'proof of concept' methodology and make use of available data sets.



- Some technical recommendations by Statistics NL (provided via chat during plenary):
  - (a) to keep it simple, (b) use what we already have/can, and (c) do something which is workable for all countries.
  - Using the existing ISCED-F classification manual, detailed fields (which is available/used by all countries). Select underlying studies that meet the criteria we all agree on (consensus needed). Example: ISCED-F 0732 (Building and civil engineering) -> choose 'Water engineering and technology' and 'Water supply and sewerage engineering' (ignore all other studies such as 'bricklaying', 'carpentry' etc.). Do this for all detailed fields. -> result = collection of all studies covering 'Water education'.
  - Each country: count all graduates in studies identified 'Water education' (based on existing education statistics, e.g. for SDG4)
  - Express these graduates as a percentage of (a) all graduates, or (b) total population.
  - Discuss: only tertiary education and/or upper secondary education, breakdown by gender, ...?
  - Using this approach, the indicator is less accurate than we would ideally wish (using weights etc.), but has advantages too: all countries can do it, better comparability between countries, developed fast and is less time consuming (costly).

## Political process

The group raised and discussed the following points of attention:

The political process breakout first of all discussed about whether to push the indicator in the current Agenda 2030 or to propose it for the post-2030 agenda. There seemed to be an agreement that we should aim at the post 2030-agenda, as it would be an easier process. More importantly, how do we make it relatively easy, globally applicable and how we are going to build a consensus on the indicator. In addition, there was a mention that there was recently a comprehensive review of all SDG indicators (during which MECCE indicators were approved); since its every 5-year process, the next review will be too late.

It was mentioned that the new indicator should be proposed by some Member States (MS). The responsible entity (UNSD/IAEG) will then ask for feedback from UN-Water. Now what is important is to prepare very well and to have a better case than what we currently have in order to be prepared to have support (from MS and UN-Water) and reach consensus. The Costa Rica representative mentioned that for MS the challenge is to apply a methodology from scratch with only 5 years left. Costa Rica took many years before being ready to monitor SDG indicators properly.

In the initial resolution UNESCO/OECD/UNEP were identified as main proponents, should we aim at additional stakeholders? And submit a specific proposal? It was also mentioned that we need to build a "coalition" of stakeholders including academia, funding agencies, etc.

Netherlands made the point of making clear where education stands in the bigger picture. And also, what lessons we learned from the current Agenda 2030 that suggests we need this new indicator. We should underline the value added and at the same time highlighting this will not create more burden.

Marina mentioned the "scaling to accelerate" initiative, related to WASH, and related to identify WASH related indicators. The initiative already identified a "family of indicators". This initiative will feed into the new SDG discussion. We can engage with this expert group. The initiative will be supported by GLAAS.

The discussion also highlighted the important aspect of institutional capacity and not only the individual level.

UNESCO position is also that we cannot push for the current Agenda 2030 as the methodology is not ready to be implemented yet. UNESCO will propose the new indicator.

A discussion of who are the actors in the countries started. In Costa Rica the Ministry of Education is not involved in tertiary education. The methodology will need to include country level evaluation.

We will also need to tailor it to the political agendas of countries; countries then decide who is the responsible entity. In NL case, it's a coordinating effort of relevant Ministries (Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science).

It's also important to understand that for the current indicator 6.a.1 it is not the country responsibility but the OECD credit reporting system. So there is very little ownership of the current indicator by the country. The same goes for the indicator of 6.b, no real ownership at country level. Overall responsibility for SDG6 lies often with different ministries, sometimes with the statistical office of the country.

Marina mentioned a revamping of the GLAAS survey mechanism.

Concerning next steps, important would be to test the methodology. And in the remainder of the process think about the impact factor. The indicator should be: feasible, doable, recommendable. In addition, we should approach decision makers with something already done and proven results (not a simple proposal). This approach should include a System approach to capacity development, underlining sectoral capacity. And therefore should include the aspect of organizational capacities.

Collect information about SDG 6 reporting - when does this take place, towards the end the year? Processes are on-going, and adding another indicator at this moment would be work. Good to know these moments, as they provide occasions to mention that a water education indicator is lacking, starting the advocacy to incorporate in a post-2030 framework.

Finally, it was mentioned to connect to the preparatory process of the 2026 United Nations Water Conference, in particular the Interactive Dialogues.

## OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Based on the presentations, questions and (breakout) discussions, the following overall conclusions and next steps are listed:

- **A Water Education Indicator is essential** to help water management organizations to assess (future) water education and capacity development needs, to develop strategies on how to address potential gaps, and to be able to measure progress and constraints in specific dimensions related to water education.
- Incorporate a Water Education Indicator in the current SDG6 framework is not feasible. Instead, we should collectively **develop a multi-annual Roadmap, to outline how to further define the indicator** (incl methodology), and to plan an advocacy campaign linked to the post-2030 Agenda political process. We should develop a ready-made 'package' of a tested and proven methodology, case studies, and use existing data sets.
- Avoid duplication: bring together, assess and refine earlier work on methodologies and **develop a globally applicable indicator framework**.
- Aim for a **system approach**, embracing various dimensions, both at the **individual and institutional levels**, e.g. universities and schools; public policies, development programmes, development banks; water agencies, regulators, NGOs, RBOs; and economic sectors, industries, jobs.
- We need **Champions** who are willing to push and pull this process.
- SDG6 would be the best 'umbrella' to organize a Water Education Indicator as SDG4 is more generic on education.
- Should we simplify the indicators, or develop more and also more detailed indicators for a better diagnosis? A dilemma and trade-off, because it would cost more time and effort. It was agreed that **more detailed indicators, as well as integrated assessments, have an added value** and we should consider how to translate this in Water Education Indicator-related developments.
- Learn from the GLAAS approach, with a **knowledge consortium** answering technical questions, and member states driving the process. Adapted to WASH.

### Next steps:

- Share workshop overall report and background reports (IHE Delft).
- Follow-up meeting to reflect on results and start preparing a Roadmap, including hosting a detailed working session on methodologies and datasets (workshop organizers).
- Report on progress at the 27th IHP Council, June 2026 (UNESCO IHP).

## ANNEX 1: LIST OF RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The following relevant background documents are collected in an online repository, made accessible via [this link](#)

### Background Documents

- New Water Education Indicator under the SDGs Brainstorm report. IHE Delft, 2018.
- Resolution XXIII-8 - IHP SUPPORT TO MEMBER STATES TOWARDS THE PROPOSAL FOR A NEW SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL INDICATOR 6.a.2 ON WATER EDUCATION. UNESCO IHP, 2018.
- Water Education Indicator - Technical Document. UNESCO IHP, 2021.
  - o Annex 1 - Water education indicator questionnaire
  - o Annex 2 - Informe Uruguay indicador educación agua
  - o Annex 3 - Water Education indicator (WEi) report. UNESCO Chair in Water Resources Management and Culture & Università per Stranieri di Perugia.
- Informe final sobre nuevo indicador agua y educación.
- System-wide Strategy on Water and Sanitation. UN Water, 2024.
- GEMI proof of Concept - case Netherlands. IHE Delft, 2016.
- Exploring new data for SMART monitoring of water SDG targets. IHE Delft, 2015.

### GLAAS Documents

- Improving monitoring of the Means of Implementation for water and sanitation. GLAAS, 2025.
- Database [link](#), online only.

## ANNEX 2: LIST OF WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

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