



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Executive Board

Two hundred and twelfth session

212 EX/9

PARIS, 16 August 2021
Original: English

Item 9 of the provisional agenda

**INTERNAL OVERSIGHT SERVICE (IOS) EVALUATION
OF THE STRATEGIC POSITIONING OF THE
INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION (IOC-UNESCO)**

SUMMARY

Recalling [IOC-Resolution XXX-3](#) and in accordance with [207 EX/Dec.5.II.A](#), this report provides a summary of a recently completed evaluation, namely: Internal Oversight Service (IOS) Evaluation of the Strategic positioning of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC-UNESCO).

Decision required: paragraph 23.



Job: 2021/02/02

INTRODUCTION

1. At its 207th session, the Executive Board requested the Director-General to continue to report periodically on completed evaluations in parallel to programme discussions (207 EX/Dec.5.II.A). The Internal Oversight Service (IOS) herewith presents a summary of the recently completed Evaluation of the Strategic Positioning of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC-UNESCO). The detailed findings, conclusions and recommendations are presented in the full evaluation report, which is available, along with the management response from the IOC-UNESCO, on the [IOS website](#).

UNESCO'S INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION

2. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC-UNESCO) is a body with functional autonomy within UNESCO. It is the only United Nations body specializing exclusively in ocean science, ocean observation, ocean data and information exchange, and dedicated ocean services such as tsunami early warning systems. Today the demand for sound ocean science to underpin the sustainable management of the oceans is more pressing than ever. In addition, the United Nations General Assembly has tasked IOC-UNESCO with the design and delivery of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030). The Decade provides a common framework to ensure ocean science can fully support countries to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3. In the context of the upcoming United Nations Decade of the Ocean, the IOC-UNESCO agreed with the Internal Oversight Service (IOS) on the merit of conducting an evaluation of its strategic positioning within the United Nations system and the broader landscape of ocean-related actors and programmes, taking into account relevant enabling policy frameworks to which the work of the Commission responds.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE EVALUATION

4. The evaluation aimed to assess the extent to which IOC-UNESCO is strategically positioned to meet the high demand for sound ocean science in support of sustainable management of the oceans in an oceanographic space that is both expanding and increasingly crowded. It is the first strategic evaluation of the IOC-UNESCO in recent years and reflects not only changing global priorities, but its increasing importance reflected in the upcoming 41 C/4 Medium Term Strategy (MTS).

5. The evaluation was conducted between December 2020 and May 2021. It followed United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) evaluation norms and standards and ethical guidelines. The evaluation benefitted from an Evaluation Reference Group comprising both internal and external members, such as IOC-UNESCO national focal points, other globally recognized ocean experts, and UNESCO and IOC-UNESCO managers. The evaluation process and tools were in line with UNEG guidance on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women policy and principles.

6. The evaluation methodology included a draft Theory of Change to assess and make explicit links and causal linkages between IOC-UNESCO activities, outputs produced and the expected outcomes. The evaluation triangulated data collected from a variety of sources, using a mixed-method data analysis approach including qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods. Furthermore, the conduct of outcome harvesting allowed to validate directly with stakeholders IOC-UNESCO's outcomes, both intended and unintended.

7. The evaluation conducted key informant interviews and a survey of UNESCO National Commissions. Focus group discussions to further explore the issues of gender equality, small island developing States, and Africa were also conducted, as well as two dedicated case studies on the blue economy and marine spatial planning. Interviewees included Member States, UNESCO staff at headquarters and field offices, non-governmental partners, and other ocean science policy actors.

KEY FINDINGS

The work undertaken by IOC-UNESCO is increasingly relevant in the context of the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and urgently needed to strengthen the sustainable management of the ocean

8. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission is the world's central repository of oceanographic data and knowledge. Its ocean observing, data and information system,¹ as well as its coordination and facilitation of access to technical experts across the globe are universally considered as important services and vital contributions to key United Nations Frameworks including UNFCCC², Sendai and CBD.³ IOC-UNESCO is also the custodian of the indicators for SDG 14.3 on Ocean Acidification and SDG 14.a on Marine Scientific Research within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Indeed, its Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network (GOA-ON) has provided technical advice and held dedicated expert meetings for the development of the indicator for SDG 14.3. The IOC-UNESCO's Global Ocean Science Report (GOSR) is recognised as the main mechanism to measure progress towards the achievement of SDG 14.a. The increasing relevance of ocean science within UNESCO was also confirmed by Member States' engagement in discussions around the Draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2029 (41 C/4) .

IOC-UNESCO has made vital technical contributions at the outcome level towards its high-level objectives⁴, although an increasing number of actors have become active in this space

9. IOC-UNESCO provides access to the data, information and science needed by the wider United Nations family and extended oceanographic community at large. However, in recent years there has been a blurring of lines between IOC-UNESCO and some other United Nations agencies which are also becoming increasingly active in the same ocean science space as IOC-UNESCO. Beyond collecting and sharing information and data, IOC-UNESCO has made policy contributions, most notably in the area of marine spatial planning which has helped countries develop their protected areas through the development of innovative information systems.

Nonetheless, IOC-UNESCO faces difficulties in engaging policy-makers at the national level

10. Despite IOC-UNESCO's success stories, several interviewees felt that it faced challenges in engaging national policy-makers, reflecting the lack of a dedicated departmental counterpart at the national level, a limited regional presence, as well as the inherent challenge of ensuring science-based policy-making. While IOC-UNESCO has had success engaging with policy-makers via existing regional organizations, the examples of this type of engagement are limited.

11. Acting as a neutral platform, bringing Member States together and fostering exchanges between governments and scientists was identified as an area where IOC is most successful. Nonetheless, IOC-UNESCO's impact is constrained at times by reluctance among Member States in sharing data. Collaboration with and among private sector owners of data can help strengthen IOC-UNESCO's contribution, but such collaboration is still incipient.

¹ International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE), Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), Ocean Biodiversity Information System (OBIS), and Tsunami Early Warning System (EWS).

² United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

³ Convention on Biodiversity.

⁴ High Level Objectives: Healthy ocean ecosystems and sustained ecosystem services; Effective early warning systems and preparedness for tsunamis and other ocean-related hazards; Increased resiliency to climate change and variability and enhanced safety, efficiency and effectiveness of all ocean-based activities through scientifically-founded services, adaptation and mitigation strategies; Enhanced knowledge of emerging ocean science issues. <https://ioc.unesco.org/about/mission-vision>.

Capacities have been developed at the individual and organizational levels but lack the necessary political will at national level to guarantee more sustainable results

12. Capacity development is an unambiguous priority for many of IOC-UNESCO's Member States, but particularly for SIDS and LDCs. IOC-UNESCO is well-positioned to meet the capacity needs of its Member States. The Global Ocean Science Report, as well as the biennial Capacity Development Needs Survey, identify existing capacities and needs and priorities, and IOC-UNESCO's Regional Training Centres together with the Regional Sub-Commissions act as delivery mechanisms. However, political commitment by Member States and available resources of IOC-UNESCO are too limited to enable a coherent, sustainable, needs-based and holistic approach.

The UNESCO global priority Gender Equality is not sufficiently resourced and lacks visibility in the ocean space within and outside IOC-UNESCO. While Priority Africa is well represented, attention to other UNESCO regional priority groups such as Pacific SIDS is considered as insufficient

13. Related to gender equality, there remains a lack of women representation in senior leadership positions. There is insufficient data collection to cement IOC-UNESCO's critical leadership role for addressing gender inequality and strengthening women's empowerment. The demand for IOC-UNESCO in Africa is strong, and while a number of African countries are active with IOC-UNESCO, overall resource constraints limit impact. IOC-UNESCO's reach among Pacific SIDS is rather limited.

IOC is not always fully recognized for its contributions not least as a result of inadequate communication

14. IOC-UNESCO's work remains sometimes "invisible". Some 63% (104/165) of survey respondents indicated that communicating with a wider audience than just scientists and policy-makers would improve IOC-UNESCO's visibility and recognition of its brand. The Ocean Decade is an obvious opportunity for IOC-UNESCO to act upon and grow in this respect.

The United Nations Decade of Ocean Science is an important opportunity, but the absence of a clearly defined results framework could jeopardize its success

15. The establishment of the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development is seen as the most important strategic institutional achievement of IOC-UNESCO in recent years. IOC-UNESCO is widely recognized as being the driving force behind the Decade which leverages the 50th anniversary of the International Decade of Ocean Exploration (IDOE, 1971-1980) and also the United Nations 2030 Agenda and its SDG 14 on the oceans. Still in early stages, there is already enormous interest on the part of the ocean community to participate and more than 230 programme proposals have been received in response to the 1st Call for Decade Action launched by IOC-UNESCO.

16. IOC-UNESCO's challenge is to bring United Nations agencies, countries and organizations together in support of the United Nations Decade. However, IOC-UNESCO has yet to develop a clearly defined results framework for the United Nations Ocean Decade, although a dedicated Working Group on Monitoring and Evaluation has been set up to achieve this. While the Decade has articulated a number of high-level scientific outcomes, not all of these are specific enough and lack indicators for their measurement. In addition, the current level of resources is inadequate compared to resources needed to make a success of such a globally important opportunity, which places the success of the Decade in jeopardy.

IOC-UNESCO and UNESCO have an opportunity to explore mutually beneficial ways of promoting the cultural, educational, and scientific dimensions of the Ocean

17. UNESCO has substantial resources and programmes on education, culture and science that could be directly linked to the ocean. This offers an important opportunity: IOC-UNESCO's budget

is centrally allocated by UNESCO, yet currently represents just 2% of UNESCO's budget. Responses from interviews indicate that IOC-UNESCO may currently not be sufficiently benefiting from UNESCO's intersectoral capacities and wider resource pool, while opportunities to mainstream the ocean more fully across all of UNESCO's programmes are emerging, such as by establishing "blue" themes, like "Blue Culture" where the ocean theme would provide a unifying perspective. Furthermore, the IOC-UNESCO Ocean Teacher Global Academy could benefit from a stronger collaboration with UNESCO's Education Sector.

The optimal institutional relationship between UNESCO and IOC-UNESCO is yet to be clarified

18. While holding a status of functional autonomy, IOC contributes to two of UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy 2014-2021 Strategic Objectives (SO)⁵. IOC-UNESCO also contributes to SO 2 under the current draft 2022-2029 UNESCO MTS⁶. Furthermore, IOC-UNESCO integrates in its work the two UNESCO cross-cutting global priorities: Global Priority Africa and Global Priority Gender Equality. IOC is considered as critical to UNESCO's mandate to contribute to Agenda 2030, and Member States are emphasizing the importance of IOC-UNESCO's role as steward of the ocean and ocean science at a time of global climate crisis in which the role of the ocean is central. Nonetheless, several key stakeholders see a direct link between IOC-UNESCO's current organizational position within UNESCO and some of its limitations. These include inadequate resourcing, and what is perceived by some as a lack of clarity around its mandate which is exacerbated by the absence of an underlying normative instrument.

IOC-UNESCO's activities increased over the last years, but its budget has not kept pace

19. One of the chief risks on IOC-UNESCO's horizon is that its current resourcing situation is not well-aligned with the number and scale of initiatives in which it is now engaged. Whilst the Ocean Decade is viewed as an opportunity by many, some 15% of interviewees, primarily internal, raised concerns about IOC-UNESCO's ability to adequately resource it. There is thus a need for the IOC-UNESCO to engage in strategic partnerships for the Decade to turn it into a "win-win". Given the increased funding that the Ocean Decade requires, its success is likely to rely on the extent to which IOC-UNESCO partners with other United Nations system organizations. It is also yet to be determined how UNESCO can best support the Ocean Decade.

Conclusions and way forward

20. The promulgation of the United Nations Decade and decision by UNGA to entrust IOC-UNESCO with its coordination has demonstrated the relevance and strategic value of IOC-UNESCO to the world. In the context of Agenda 2030, IOC-UNESCO's role only increases in importance. The Decade is thus an opportunity for IOC-UNESCO to reaffirm its global leading position and relevance to the members of United Nations Oceans, to policy-makers and to the world at large in helping to bring about a more sustainable management of the ocean.

21. Collaboration with other agencies to develop a monitoring framework with measurable indicators should be prioritized to ensure an optimum allocation of resources and tasks. Increasing decentralized work at the regional level, in particular harmonizing efforts with existing regional networks and organizations, is also a means of enhancing impact at the national level. It is also imperative that IOC-UNESCO strengthens its efforts to provide advisory services to Member States at the national level, supporting the capacity development and national policy development in alignment with objectives laid out in SDG 14 of Agenda 2030.

⁵ Namely: (i) Strategic Objective 4: Strengthening science technology and innovation systems and policies – nationally, regionally and globally; and (ii) Strategic Objective 5: Promoting international scientific cooperation on critical challenges to sustainable development.

⁶ 'Work towards sustainable societies by preserving the environment through the promotion of science, technology and the natural heritage.'

22. IOC-UNESCO should fully assume its role as steward of the ocean science agenda, in particular by promoting gender equality in leadership positions and as mentors to develop national level initiatives and achievement of outcomes related to marine science gender equality. Finally, the evaluation suggests exploring the optimal financial and organizational arrangements to support Member States in decision-making in view of IOCs envisaged global positioning in science-based ocean management and for leading the United Nations Ocean Decade as well as to facilitate intersectoral collaboration.

Proposed draft decision

23. The Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling IOC-Resolution XXX-3 regarding the programme and budget of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC),
2. Having examined document 212 EX/9,
3. Welcomes the evaluation of the strategic positioning of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), and takes note with interest of its findings and recommendations;
4. Also welcomes the corresponding management response (Annex to document 212 EX/9);
5. Calls on all Member States, partners and donors to support the Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) in view of IOC's envisaged global role in science-based ocean management and in leading the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development;
6. Invites the Director-General to transmit document 212 EX/9 to the governing bodies of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) for consideration as appropriate;
7. Also invites the Director-General to enable adequate follow-up to all the recommendations set out in document 212 EX/9.

ANNEX

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Overall Management Response	
<p>The IOC-UNESCO Secretariat thanks the UNESCO Internal Oversight Service (IOS) for the evaluation. The domain of IOC-UNESCO activities is indeed becoming increasingly important for sustainable development. Equally, it is a fast-evolving domain where processes of intergovernmental governance lag behind expanding requirements of the world. IOC-UNESCO, as a home and source of authoritative ocean science in the United Nations system, is harmonically placed to support the mandates of nearly all United Nations agencies comprising the UN-Oceans consortium and to help them deliver as “one UN”. IOC-UNESCO is also increasingly shaping the work of United Nations conventions by guiding on issues and opportunities, particularly with regard to the climate, biodiversity, disaster risk reduction, ocean-economy and ocean-management. The issue of IOC-UNESCO positioning within UNESCO and the United Nations and the availability of adequate resources becomes therefore critical. It does require a solution.</p> <p>In that connection, as also noted in the report, the Ocean Decade brings to IOC-UNESCO an important opportunity to make a difference. However, the opportunity comes along with a risk to visibly fail on delivery, given the scale of the undertaking. Nevertheless, taking the risk is warranted because without the Decade, the IOC-UNESCO would have faced another risk of stagnating and ceding leadership to better resourced organizations. Because of that, IOC-UNESCO seized the opportunity to design and initiate the Decade, deliver on its preparation, and use it as a leverage mechanism.</p> <p>The Secretariat appreciates the positive assessment of the IOC-UNESCO’s traditional work in “functions”: research, observations, data, early warning systems (tsunami), ocean management (e.g. maritime spatial planning), assessments, and capacity development. Because the emerging management of the ocean is becoming more and more science-intensive, the Secretariat anticipates fast growth of all existing IOC-UNESCO functions, including accelerated build-up of a user-centred ocean data system, progress in communications, creating a knowledge-building and sharing environment, and promotion of best practices, fuelled by research, observations, analyses and predictions.</p>	
Recommendations	Management response
<p>Recommendation 1: High Priority</p> <p><i>By September 2022</i></p> <p>Follow up on the request of the IOC-UNESCO 30th Assembly by estimating the necessary resources and accelerating the application of provisions of Article 10.4 of the IOC-UNESCO Statutes to effectively operate the IOC at an optimal level, as well as to determine the most appropriate organizational setting in view of IOC’s envisaged global role in science-based ocean management and leading the UN Ocean Decade.</p> <p>Addressed to: <i>IOC-UNESCO Secretariat and UNESCO Secretariat</i></p>	<p>Accepted</p> <p>In 2019, the IOC-UNESCO 30th Assembly requested the Executive Secretary to present to the Assembly a vision of “optimal” IOC-UNESCO. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and, to a greater extent, due to the unprecedented intensity of continuing changes in the ocean-related affairs, including ocean-climate nexus, marine biodiversity of the open ocean, new level of understanding in the area of ocean management related to the work of the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, and the arrival of the UN Ocean Decade, the landscape of work, requirements and opportunities for IOC-UNESCO are constantly changing and broadening. Nevertheless, with the help of this Evaluation Report, the sum of knowledge and certainty in anticipation of key developments in the ocean management approaches will create conditions for developing the requested vision. The vision will be the necessary first step towards working on strengthening the position of IOC within UNESCO. It is therefore essential to first of all generate a clear vision of the Member States requirements, then prepare a vision of the capacities and means of delivery by IOC-UNESCO and subsequently undertake an assessment of what is required for achieving the vision and the estimated means of doing so, fully or partially. IOC Member States will be constantly consulted in this process, through the involvement and leadership of Officers, deliberations at the Executive Council in 2022, and Assembly in 2023.</p>

<p>Recommendation 2: Medium Priority</p> <p><i>By June 2022</i></p> <p>Develop in partnership with other agencies a Results Framework for the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, clearly identifying objectives, intermediate objectives, indicators, and indicative owners across the United Nations system and wider in order to monitor and evaluate progress against the Decade's objectives.</p> <p><i>Addressed to: IOC-UNESCO Secretariat</i></p>	<p>Accepted</p> <p>The Ocean Decade Implementation Plan, which was presented to the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly, has clearly identified objectives of the Decade. The UNGA took note of the Plan with appreciation. The plan is a flexible document, though, given that at the beginning of the Decade development no additional resources were available.</p> <p>The path towards achieving the goals will not look the same as for a simple funded project, such as with a Gant diagram. First, necessary and already partially resourced developments will be approved before moving forward (34 Decade programmes have already been approved). Secondly, under-resourced but necessary developments will be identified and promoted. The overall investment in the Decade will be measured in billions of US dollar equivalents. The co-design, engagement and resourcing will be achieved through community building.</p> <p>The recommendation rightfully highlights the need to have a sharper vision on deliverables and reporting. Its implementation will be greatly facilitated by forming the Decade Advisory Board (in 2021), which will be pursuing the Decade monitoring and evaluation process, co-designing future directions of Decade actions, and helping IOC to issue and follow on corresponding calls for Decade action.</p> <p>A Monitoring and Evaluation framework has been developed and will provide the key contribution to this work.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: Medium Priority</p> <p><i>By June 2022</i></p> <p>Determine how UNESCO can support the Decade.</p> <p><i>Addressed to: IOC-UNESCO Secretariat and UNESCO Senior Management</i></p>	<p>Accepted</p> <p>The Recommendation 3 will be brought to the attention of UNESCO Senior Management. There is indeed a need to establish a well-staffed and equipped Decade Coordination Unit, so that the ocean agenda can be further mainstreamed within UNESCO. The Executive Secretary will make a presentation on this matter at the retreat of Senior Management of UNESCO in September 2021. The main proposal will be to expand intersectoral work for the Decade.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: High Priority</p> <p><i>By June 2024</i></p> <p>Consider options for further exploiting IOC-UNESCO's data and knowledge base.</p> <p><i>Addressed to: IOC-UNESCO Secretariat</i></p>	<p>Accepted</p> <p>The Recommendation 4 is being implemented. There is a special challenge of the Decade focusing on data and knowledge. A major Decade programme on "digital twin of the ocean" has been endorsed by IOC-UNESCO. The Executive Secretary's proposal to develop a State of the Ocean Report was positively considered by IOC's 31st Assembly. A conference on IOC-UNESCO's contribution to the data work, via OceanInfoHub and International Ocean Data and Information Exchange is in the making. There are several notable efforts underway, like Copernicus CMEMS, ocean part of CMIP, and a number of ocean services developed through the GOOS community. It is a useful recommendation for IOC, also because of the need to populate the ocean data ecosystem with predictive data.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5: High Priority</p> <p><i>By June 2022</i></p> <p>Explore means of attracting additional senior policy engagement in the work of IOC-UNESCO.</p>	<p>Accepted</p> <p>IOC is working with UNESCO senior management on identifying UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors interested in ocean matters. IOC will seriously consider possibilities of Establishing an Ocean Science and Policy Forum. Some seed of this forum may already exist in the Decade Alliance, despite the Alliance being more about resource mobilization for the Decade. The Forum would need to be driven by Member States as it will require national contributions to support this process (such as staff, conferences). An initial step might be to conduct a feasibility study to understand the possibilities</p>

<p><i>Addressed to:</i> <i>IOC-UNESCO Secretariat</i></p>	<p>(given there are several events yearly that address these issues) and the potential additional value that such a forum will bring, as well as to explore resourcing and potential modalities, (including a process to foresee that Member States can offer hosting the forum events). The momentum created by the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy may lead to similar developments as the proposed Ocean Science and Policy Forum.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6: High Priority <i>By June 2022</i></p> <p>Assume a leadership role in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment in marine science, supporting its existing data efforts such as the Global Ocean Science Report with dedicated action.</p> <p><i>Addressed to:</i> <i>IOC-UNESCO Secretariat in collaboration with UNESCO's Gender Equality Division</i></p>	<p>Accepted</p> <p>The IOC-UNESCO management is in full agreement with the recommendation on advancing the gender-equality in IOC-UNESCO and ocean sciences related work. IOC-UNESCO is in a leading position with regard to evaluation of the gender balance in quantitative terms. However, like many other partners, the historically male-dominated landscape of ocean-related activities and the corresponding pedigree of IOC-UNESCO leadership, both in terms of Commission Officers and senior management, are an impediment. This is also an area where the Decade can help, and in June 2021 the Executive Secretary approved a Decade Programme focusing on women leadership in ocean sciences. The deliberations under that Programme may help IOC-UNESCO to develop a plan towards achieving more gender-equality and a gender-balanced work force on all levels.</p>