



October 12, 2026

Press Statement

Africa Week of Action Against Privatisation, 2026

Theme: Reclaiming Africa's Water Future: Public Water for All

The Our Water, Our Right Africa Coalition (OWORAC) brings together communities, civil society organisations, workers, women, youth and water justice movements across Africa in marking the 2026 Africa Week of Action Against Water Privatisation, taking place from 12–18 October 2026, under the theme, “Reclaiming Africa’s Water Future: Public Water for All.”

This year’s mobilisation comes at a critical moment for the continent, as water takes centre stage in Africa’s development agenda and in global policy discussions. Governments across Africa continue to confront the consequences of years of corporate water grabs and exploitation, limited public investment, weakened water utility services, population growth, rapid urbanisation, intensifying climate pressures and heightened privatisation of public water systems. OWORAC therefore calls on governments across the continent to ensure that Africa’s water future is shaped by the needs, rights and voices of the people who depend on water every day.

Across the continent, the scale of lack of access remains staggering. Globally, 2.1 billion people lacked safely managed drinking water in 2024, while 3.4 billion lacked safely managed sanitation. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, 167 million people were using limited drinking-water services in 2024, accounting for more than half of the global population relying on services at this level.¹

The burden is particularly acute for low-income households, rural communities and underserved urban and peri-urban settlements. These figures represent more than an infrastructure deficit. For many households across Africa, the absence of reliable public water means drawing from unsafe open sources or paying more

¹ WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP). (2025). *Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000–2024: Special focus on inequalities*. <https://washdata.org/reports/jmp-2025-wash-households>

for water from vendors, public standpipes, private boreholes, tankers and packaged-water suppliers, often without reliable assurances of quality or safety.

Research on urban water access in sub-Saharan Africa has found that low-income households dependent on vendors may pay 10 to 20 times more per unit of water than wealthier households connected to public networks.² This is a poverty penalty in which those with the lowest incomes can end up paying the highest prices for an essential service.

At the same time, it is of particular concern that, as governments deal with infrastructure gaps and financing pressures, approaches such as public-private partnerships, concessions, commercial tariffs, prepaid meter water systems and increased private-sector participation are increasingly presented as solutions to Africa's water challenges. In fact, over the years, untold sums have been poured into efforts to privatise public water systems where that money and political will could be otherwise better spent on directly meeting the needs of people. While investment in water and sanitation is urgently required, the financing and governance models adopted matter. Where access to water becomes increasingly dependent on people's ability to pay before access, existing inequalities can be deepened rather than resolved. Furthermore, privatisation schemes have a well-documented track record of failure above and beyond the immediate concern of unaffordable service, ranging from infrastructure neglect to labour abuses to environmental degradation. This underscores why the answer to years of public underinvestment cannot simply be to transfer public responsibilities to commercial interests.

The concern extends beyond water supply to other essential services such as sanitation-wastewater and solid-waste management. In many African cities, poor sanitation, inadequate wastewater management and unmanaged waste continue to contaminate water bodies, undermine public health and worsen flooding. Outsourcing these essential environmental services does not necessarily resolve these failures and, in fact, may exacerbate them.

Private water industry leader Veolia's track record illustrates how multinational corporations can expand their role over essential services while reproducing the same failures where public oversight is weak and private profits are paramount. Although the company presents itself as a leader in ecological transformation, Global Witness reported in 2025 that footage from a Veolia-managed landfill in

² Sam Kayaga and Richard Franceys. (2007). "Costs of Urban Utility Water Connections: Excessive Burden to the Poor." *Utilities Policy*, 15(4), 270–277. Loughborough University Repository.

Colombia appeared to show untreated leachate being pumped into waterways that flow into protected wetlands. Tests commissioned as part of the investigation also found elevated mercury levels at one sampling point.³

The corporation's abuses span the globe, including the African continent where the Gabonese state alleged that petroleum waste was found in "nearly all" pumping stations following years of Veolia's operation.⁴ And Veolia is not alone amongst its industry peers. Multinational water giant Suez has secured control of Senegal's urban and peri-urban water systems, to the detriment of the local community and workers, along with allegations of significant financial mismanagement⁵.

These concerns are even more urgent as droughts, floods, pollution and other climate-related disruptions intensify existing vulnerabilities across Africa. Ordinarily, these realities should compel governments to strengthen public water institutions, publicly invest in resilient infrastructure and ensure that every community can rely on safe water. Instead, public-sector weakness is increasingly treated as an invitation for commercial intervention. OWORAC rejects this logic. Years of underinvestment and administrative failure cannot justify transferring essential public responsibilities to private interests whose primary obligation is to generate profit.

Africa's water future cannot hinge on attracting more private investment. It must be built on functioning public water systems that people can rely on. This requires strengthening public institutions, increasing public investments in water infrastructure and workers, improving data and planning systems, protecting public water resources and ensuring that communities have their voices recognised in decisions that affect their lives. This is how Africa can reclaim its water future.

The year 2026 presents an important opportunity for African governments to chart this course. Already the African Union has designated 2026 as the Year of "Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063", alongside the launch of the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy. At the global level, the 2026 United Nations Water

³ Poisoned Ground: Secretly filmed footage shows Veolia pumping toxic pollutants into protected Colombian wetlands. (2025). *Global Witness*. <https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/land-and-environmental-defenders/poisoned-ground/>.

⁴ Gabon accuses France's Veolia of polluting amid concession dispute. (2018). *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/business/finance/gabon-accuses-frances-veolia-of-polluting-amid-concession-dispute-idUSKCN1GB20O/>.

⁵ Nar Dia, A. (2024, July 20). The opaque accounts of Sen Eau and Suez under fire in Senegal. *Senego*, Retrieved from https://senego.com/les-comptes-opaques-de-sen-eau-et-suez-sous-le-feu-des-critiques-au-senegal_1725663.html.

Conference also provides an important platform for advancing commitments on water and sanitation. This recognition must be backed by action.

It is within this context that OWORAC developed its position paper, *Implementing the Africa Water Vision 2063: An OWORAC Coalition Position on Water Justice, Public Financing and Democratic Water Governance*. The paper examines the opportunities and gaps in implementing the Africa Water Vision 2063 and proposes measures to ensure that the continent's water future is grounded in human rights, public accountability, adequate public financing and democratic water governance. In particular, OWORAC and its allies are calling on African governments to:

- Prioritise universal access to safe, affordable and reliable water and sanitation services as a public responsibility and human right.
- Establish clear and measurable national and regional financing commitments, including a public investment benchmark for water and sanitation.
- Strengthen and adequately fund public water institutions and utilities, while safeguarding them from undue external interference and commercial capture.
- Make transparent all water-related contracts, agreements, financing arrangements, tariffs, allocations and expenditures.
- Guarantee the meaningful participation of communities, workers, women and other affected groups in water governance and decision-making.
- Reject privatisation, commercialisation, concessions, public-private partnerships, management and lease contracts, outsourcing, prepaid water-meter systems, and other arrangements that transfer the control or delivery of public water services to commercial interests.

SIGNED

- 1. Senegalese Water Justice Network (Senegal)**
- 2. Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (Nigeria)**
- 3. Amaka Nweke Foundation (Nigeria)**
- 4. Water Citizens Network / Revenue Mobilisation Africa (Ghana)**
- 5. Disability Not a Barrier Initiative (Nigeria)**
- 6. Cheriehomes Global Initiatives (Northeast Nigeria)**
- 7. Christian Initiative For Nation Building (Nigeria)**

- 8. Green Scenery (Sierra Leone)**
- 9. Voices for Water (Zimbabwe)**
- 10. Biodiversity and Biosafety Association of Kenya (Kenya)**
- 11. Corporate Accountability (International)**