

WATER JUSTICE FOR ALL #OurWaterOurRight

IMPLEMENTING THE AFRICA WATER VISION 2063:

AN OWORAC POSITION

ON

WATER JUSTICE, PUBLIC CONTROL AND DEMOCRATIC

WATER GOVERNANCE

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AU	African Union
AMCOW	African Ministers' Council on Water
DAWASA	Dar es Salaam Water and Sewerage Authority
FAVS	Fondo Agua por la Vida y la Sostenibilidad
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
JMP	Joint Monitoring Programme
MPP	Make Polluters Pay
OWORAC	Our Water Our Right Africa Coalition
PPPs	Public-Private Partnerships
PUPs	Public-Public Partnerships
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The African Union's 2026 Theme of the Year, "*Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063,*" presents a timely opportunity to transform water governance across Africa through the implementation of the Africa Water Vision 2063. The Our Water Our Right Africa Coalition (OWORAC) welcomes the Vision's recognition of water as a driver of economic development, climate resilience and sustainable growth. However, effective implementation requires stronger safeguards to ensure that economic priorities do not undermine water as a fundamental human right and public good.

We must not allow an emphasis on private sector involvement – from private finance to so-called public-private partnerships – to be a poison pill that undermines this bold vision at the expense of our communities.

This position paper identifies key implementation strengths and gaps, including limited protections against the commercialisation of water, insufficient transparency in financing mechanisms, and weak institutional arrangements for community participation. OWORAC recommends an inclusive implementation framework that prioritises public control of water services, affordability, equity, transparent financing, inclusive water governance, stronger public regulation, and public-public partnerships. These measures will help ensure that the Africa Water Vision 2063 delivers equitable, accountable and sustainable water services for all Africans.

BACKGROUND

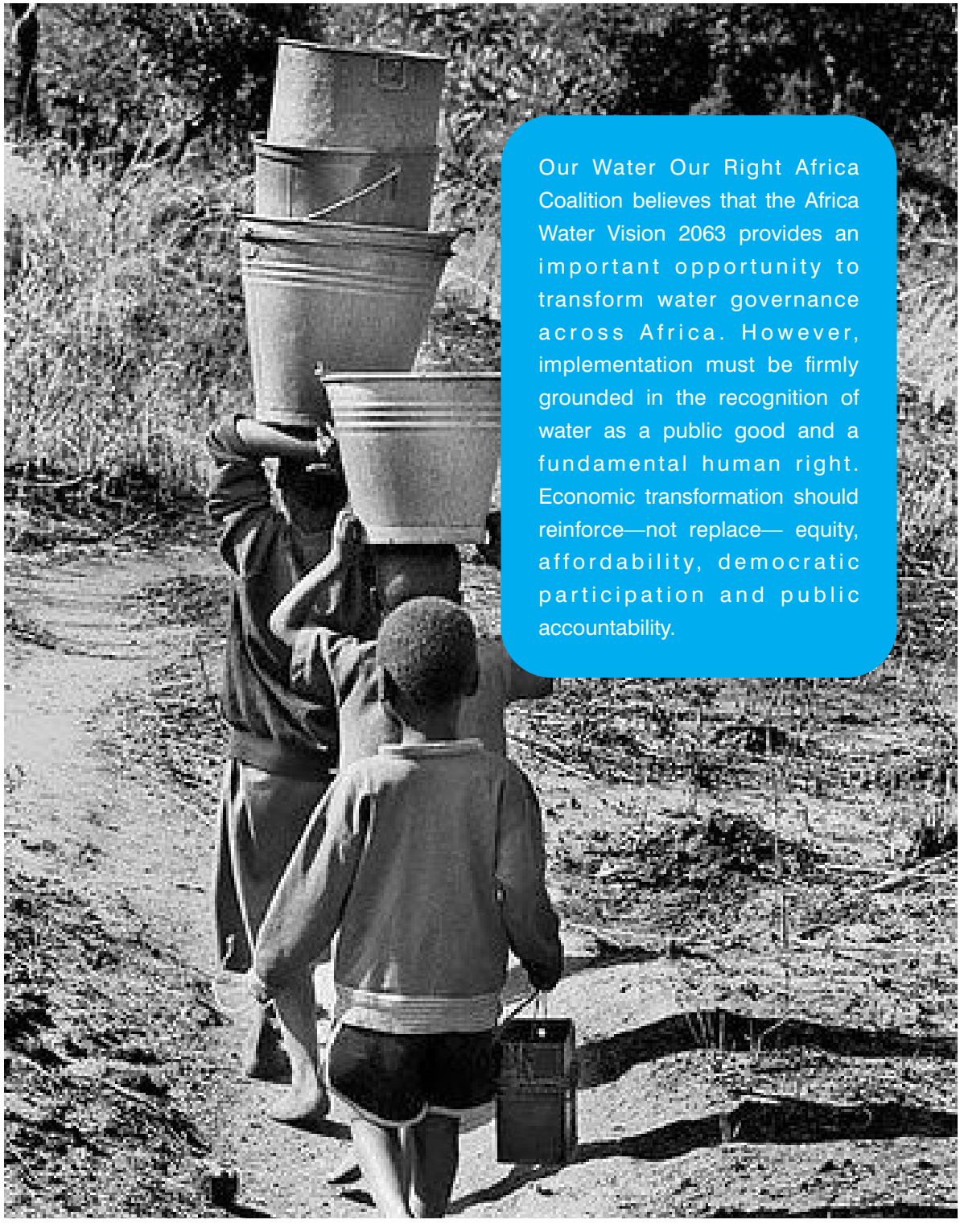
The African Union's (AU) theme for 2026, “Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063”, officially launched on the 14th of February 2026, during the 39th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly in Ethiopia, is by far an annual commemorative theme, one designed to acknowledge the place of water and sanitation at the centre of Africa's development agenda. It reinforces that water is a strategic foundation and cross-cutting development priority where sustainable economic growth, public health, education, food security, climate resilience, innovation and regional peace are inter-linked.[1]

The evidence is unequivocal, because access to reliable, safe water and sanitation does improve health and social outcomes, which are the reduction of waterborne diseases, support for agricultural productivity, contribution to economic productivity, enhancing educational opportunities and protecting ecosystems. Conversely, inadequate access to water and sanitation perpetuates poverty, inequality, diseases, and environmental degradation as currently witnessed in many African countries. As corroborated by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP), achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa, which are synonymous with the Africa Water Vision 2063, will require a 12-fold increase in the current rate of progress for safely managed drinking water and a 20-fold increase for safely managed sanitation.[2]

Despite possessing significant freshwater resources, Africa continues to face profound disparities in access to safe water. Hundreds of millions of people across the continent experience varying levels of water insecurity, including lacking access to even basic drinking water service, while Sub-Saharan is home to the highest number of water-stressed countries globally.[3] Millions of people on the continent continue to rely on unsafe water sources, while inadequate sanitation contributes to preventable illnesses and premature deaths. Rapid population growth, urbanisation, ageing infrastructure, weak governance, limited investment, privatisation and the increasing impacts of climate change have further intensified these challenges. More frequent droughts, floods, changing rainfall patterns, and declining water quality threaten both human wellbeing and economic development.

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1. African Union. (2026). Africa Water Vision 2063 and policy. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/46011-doc-EN-Africa_Water_Vision_2063_and_Policy.pdf
2. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) & World Health Organization. (2025). Progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in Africa. https://data.unicef.org/resources/progress-on-drinking-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-in-africa/
3. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. (2022). Report on Africa regional consultations. https://uneca.org/sites/default/files/ACPC/2022/WATERACTION/Report_on_Africa_regional_consultations_EN.pdf



Our Water Our Right Africa Coalition believes that the Africa Water Vision 2063 provides an important opportunity to transform water governance across Africa. However, implementation must be firmly grounded in the recognition of water as a public good and a fundamental human right. Economic transformation should reinforce—not replace— equity, affordability, democratic participation and public accountability.

STRENGTHS, GAPS, AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES IN THE AFRICA WATER VISION 2063

- **Integrating Water Valuation into Core Economic Priorities and High-Impact Sectors:** The Vision precisely recognises water as a strategic driver of economic transformation that underpins virtually every productive sector of the economy. Without reliable access to water, industrial production slows, agricultural output declines, energy generation is disrupted, businesses face higher operating costs, and communities become more vulnerable to insufferable poverty, public health crisis and displacement. The Vision, therefore, proposes that water security should be integrated into national economic planning and treated as a national priority with a foundation on sustainable development rather than a standalone sectorial issue. This simply means that commitment to this approach requires Governments embedding water considerations within their national development plans revolving around industrial; climate adaptation; energy; and agricultural policies.[4]

  However, the strong emphasis on economic valuation risks reducing water to an economic commodity and investment market scheme. While the vision posits water's contribution to GDP, industrialisation, agricultural development and a host of others, there is less attention to ensuring that economic priorities do not displace vulnerable communities or divert water away from domestic consumption in favour of commercially profitable sectors.

  This concern is particularly pressing given that many vulnerable communities across the continent already contend with high tariffs, inconsistent supply of water, and poorly managed water systems involving both public authorities and private actors. Senegal's experience provides an important case study, particularly given its leadership role in continental water governance. As the current Chair of the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW), Senegal plays a central role in shaping Africa's water policy direction and influencing the implementation of the Africa Water Vision 2063. Since 2020, the distribution of urban water services in the country has been managed by Sen'Eau, a company led by the French multinational Suez under a public-private management arrangement. While the reform was supposed to improve service delivery and operational efficiency, it has generated sustained concerns among communities, civil society organisations and labour unions regarding water affordability, transparency in the management of public water services, labour relations and public accountability.

[4] (African Union, 2026 – Africa Water Vision 2063)

In addition, trade unions have reported instances of intimidation and retaliation against workers seeking to organise and advocate for improved working conditions, raising broader concerns about workers' rights and governance within the sector. Given Senegal's influential position in shaping continental water governance, this experience highlights the importance of ensuring that water sector reforms across Africa are accompanied by an outright rejection of privatisation schemes, labour protections and meaningful public participation to safeguard both the public interest and the human right to water.[5]

Economic development objectives must therefore be balanced with principles of affordability, equity and universal access. The possibility of this balance is evidenced in Tanzania (Dar es Salaam), which ended a disastrous privatisation arrangement in the early 2000s. The public-public partnership model institutionalised the notion of prioritising the utility's ability to provide water service to residents over an ability to maximise profits for shareholders. Stemming from this shift, revenue generation increased while avoiding sharp tariff increases and household connections increased, particularly in low-income areas. This demonstrated that economic development objectives can be balanced with principles of affordability, equity and universal access.[6]

- **Prioritising Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) for Development Interventions:** The Vision's commitment to Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) truly reflects internationally recognised best practice, stressing the notion that coordinating water allocation across agriculture, industry, energy and environmental conservation has the potential to improve efficiency and reduce competing demands.[7]

  Nevertheless, the proposed IWRM development hubs appear heavily oriented towards supporting industrial growth, commercial agriculture and large-scale economic investments. The framework gives relatively limited attention to community-led water governance, indigenous knowledge systems and the participation of local water users in planning and decision-making.

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5. Centre for Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPPA). (2026). Africa Water Vision 2063: OWORAC cautions on water privatisation, urges community participation in implementation. https://cappaafrica.org/2026/05/17/africa-water-vision-2063-oworac-cautions-on-water-privatisation-urges-community-participation-in-implementation/
6. Rooney, E. (2024). *Failed privatisation in urban water utilities: Can PuPs pick up the pieces? Reviewing evidence from Dar es Salaam, 2005–2018*. . https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2024.103998
7. (African Union, 2026 – Africa Water Vision 2063)

IWRM can be implemented through inclusive participatory governance structures that place communities—not only governments and investors—at the centre of water management especially given that there is the need to build enabling environment and strong institutions to share data freely and strengthen information management systems. Colombia's water management structure through collective stewardship commonly referred to as Fondo Agua por la Vida y la Sostenibilidad (FAVS) is a vivid example of this, where the management and funding of water was coordinated by public water utilities, regional environmental authorities, local governments, indigenous communities and carefully bounded private participation framed as stewardship.[8]

- **De-risking and Blended Finance Mechanisms:** Mobilising additional investment for Africa's water sector is essential, and the Vision correctly identifies political risk, revenue uncertainty and financing gaps as major obstacles. This proposed use of blended finance may attract investment.[9]

  Nonetheless, the financing strategy raises several concerns because there are limited safeguards regarding the role of private investors, development finance institutions and public-private partnerships. Although the vision acknowledges and encourages transparency and accountability, the de-risking mechanisms may effectively transfer financial risks from private investors to the state and consumers, many of whom are vulnerable communities at the receiving end. Private investment and finance have repeatedly proved to be at odds with the needs and priorities of the wider public, particularly in the provision of essential services such as water.[10]

  In response to the urgent need for sustainable investment for water and sanitation, there is the need to establish a continental benchmark for public investment in water and sanitation, including a clear target for the proportion of national budgets allocated to the sector. This benchmark could provide a shared standard for government commitment, and it should be accompanied by measurable indicators covering allocation, disbursement, implementation, outcomes and accountability, enabling governments and the public to track progress.

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8. Restrepo, J. D., Masiero, M., & Leonardi, A. (2025). *Assessing governance and impacts of water funds in Colombia: An institutional analysis*. https://doi.org/10.3390/su172210407
9. (African Union, 2026 – Africa Water Vision 2063)
10. Transnational Institute (TNI). (2024). *Public finance for the future we want*. https://www.tni.org/en/publication/public-finance-for-the-future-we-want





Such a benchmark will strengthen public investment while protecting affordability, equitable access, public control and meaningful community participation, and provide a basis for mobilising additional public resources through mechanisms such as Make Polluters Pay (MPP), a percentage of national budget on the water sector and multi-year, protected public investment flows.

The 2001 Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases offers a useful precedent. African Heads of State and Government pledged to set a target of allocating at least 15% of their annual budgets to improving the health sector. The target subsequently became an important continental reference point for tracking and assessing government commitment to health financing, despite uneven implementation across countries.[11] A similar approach exists in education, where the Education 2030 Framework for Action benchmarks government expenditure on education at 4–6% of GDP and public expenditure on education at 15–20% of total government expenditure.[12] A comparable continental benchmark for water and sanitation could establish a clear political standard and strengthen accountability for delivering universal, affordable and equitable access, it can also be leveraged as a global standard for the critical position of water for development.

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[11] African Union (AU). (2001). *Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and other related infectious diseases*. https://ulii.org/en/akn/aa-au/statement/declaration/2001/hiv-aids-tuberculosis/eng%402001-04-27

[12] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). (2025). *[Expenditure report]*. https://www.uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2025/08/EDS-6-Expenditure-Final-WEB.pdf

OWORAC'S COALITION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recognise Water Primarily as a Human Right and Public Good

While OWORAC welcomes the Vision's recognition of water as a catalyst for economic transformation, Member States must ensure that economic valuation does not supersede the recognition of water as a fundamental human right and public good. National implementation frameworks should explicitly prioritise universal, affordable and equitable access to safe water over commercial returns. Economic growth strategies must therefore be accompanied by legally enforceable safeguards that prevent the diversion of water resources from domestic and community needs towards commercially profitable sectors as well as safeguard against predatory privatisation schemes for water utilities.

2. Reject water privatisation and corporate control schemes in all their forms

Due to the overwhelming evidence of privatisation's failures on the African continent and globally,[13] it is abundantly clear that this is a false solution to a very real water crisis. The African Union and its Member States must explicitly reject water privatisation, including under the guise of so-called public-private partnerships, and excise its mention throughout the 2063 agenda to avoid endorsement of a failed model of water governance. Doing so will signal that corporate water grabs are not welcome on the continent and make clear that the Union and its Members are serious about sustainable, public solutions that prioritise the needs of people over profits.

3. Establish a Continental Water and Sanitation Financing Benchmark

OWORAC recognises that achieving universal access to safe water and sanitation requires sustained investment. We therefore call for a continental financing benchmark for water and sanitation that sets a clear public financing standard for governments. The benchmark should prioritise universal, affordable and equitable access, protect public control, strengthen public water systems and ensure community participation. It should be backed by national financing targets, transparent monitoring, public reporting and community oversight, making water and sanitation a clear public investment priority under Agenda 2063.

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[13] Our Water Our Right Africa Coalition (OWORAC). (2021). *Africa must rise and resist water privatisation*. https://africawateraction.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Africa-Must-Rise-Resist-Water-Privatisation-final11.pdf

4. **Adopt a more inclusive Framework for Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)**

   OWORAC supports the adoption of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) but recommends that implementation move beyond a predominantly infrastructure- and investment-led approach. National IWRM strategies should institutionalise community participation, recognise indigenous knowledge systems and establish multi-stakeholder governance structures involving public utilities, local governments, civil society organisations, labour unions, women, youth and water users. Water governance should be based on collective stewardship rather than solely on economic optimisation.

5. **Promote Public-Public Partnerships as a Preferred Model for Strengthening Water Utilities**

   The Africa Water Vision 2063 should more explicitly recognise Public-Public Partnerships (PUPs) as a viable alternative to commercial public-private partnerships. Experiences such as the Dar es Salaam Water and Sewerage Authority (DAWASA) in Tanzania demonstrate that publicly managed cooperation between utilities can significantly improve operational efficiency, expand service coverage and increase financial sustainability without imposing sharp tariff increases or transferring control of essential public services to private operators. Member States should document, finance and replicate successful African PUP models across the continent.

6. **Strengthen Community Participation in Water Governance and Decision-Making**

   Meaningful participation should become a mandatory component of the implementation of the Africa Water Vision 2063. Governments should establish formal mechanisms through which communities, women, youth, indigenous peoples, labour unions and grassroots organisations can participate in water planning, financing, implementation and monitoring. Community consultation should extend beyond information-sharing to include genuine influence over decisions affecting local water resources.

7. **Establish an African Water Accountability and Monitoring Mechanism**

   The African Union and AMCOW should develop an independent monitoring framework that tracks implementation of the Africa Water Vision 2063 using indicators on affordability, equity, transparency, public participation, financing and environmental sustainability. Communities, right-holders, academics and civil society organisations should be formally involved in monitoring and reporting progress.

CONCLUSION

OWORAC recognises Africa Water Vision 2063 as a bold and transformative framework capable of advancing Africa's water security, economic resilience and sustainable development. However, the Vision's success will ultimately depend on implementation that is firmly grounded in human rights, democratic governance, public accountability and social justice.

Water is a shared public good that sustains life, protects ecosystems and upholds the dignity of all people. Its contribution to industrialisation and economic growth must respect the human right to water and sanitation. By ensuring that financing arrangements protect public ownership and democratic control of water services, enabling meaningful community participation, promoting transparent governance and prioritising equitable access, African governments can realise the Vision's ambitions while ensuring that no one is left behind. Doing so requires safeguarding water governance from private financial interests, including corporations seeking operational control of utilities and industries whose intensive water use undermines equitable access. These principles should guide the implementation of the Vision and inform the collective efforts of governments, regional institutions, development partners and civil society in achieving a water-secure future for Africa.

SIGNED

1. Senegalese Water Justice Network (Senegal)
2. Water Citizens Network / Revenue Mobilisation Africa (Ghana)
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)
12. Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa



The Our Water Our Right Africa Coalition (OWORAC) is a pan-African movement dedicated to defending the human right to water across the continent.
We are a network of grassroot organisations, community movements, activists, trade unions, and civil society groups united by the belief that access to clean, affordable water is a fundamental right, not a commodity for profit.

WATER JUSTICE FOR ALL
#OurWaterOurRight

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