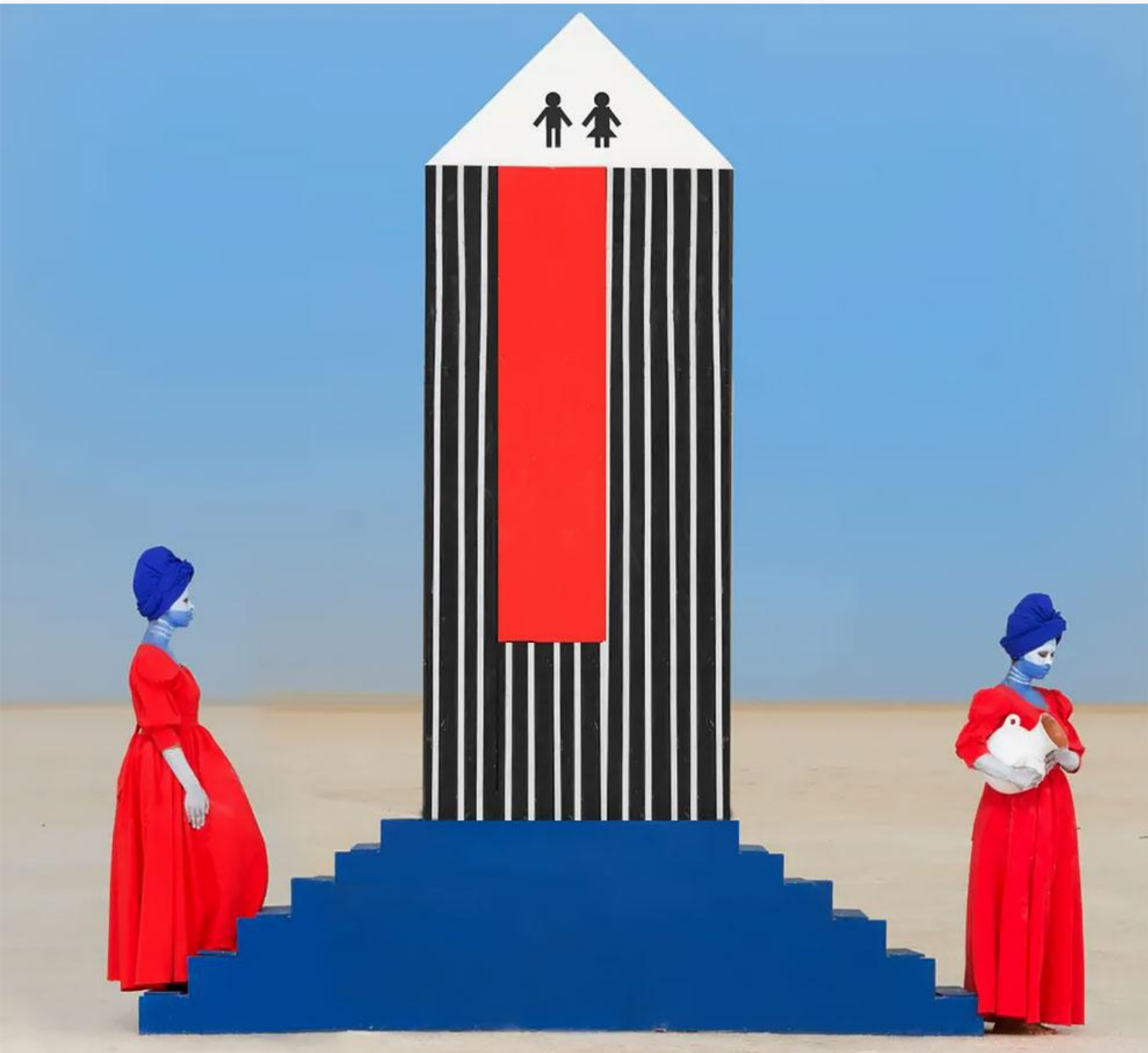


100

AFRICAN WOMEN LEADING AFRICA'S WATER & SANITATION FUTURE
An Inaugural Continental Compendium

FIRST EDITION, 2026





Just as the Bali people of South Sudan dance along the Nile to honour the river's life-giving power, profiling 100 African Women Leading Africa's Water & Sanitation Future reflects a modern act of recognition. Across many African cultures, water is more than a resource; it is a vital link between land and life. These women are at the forefront of that connection. Through their work, they transform systems, improve health, strengthen communities and economies. They are the modern-day Rain Chiefs leaders who turn policy into practice and scarcity into opportunity. This recognition places their contributions where they belong: at the centre of Africa's water and sanitation future. By telling their stories, we preserve a legacy of resilience and ensure that the leadership of African women remains essential to the continent's water security.

Credit: ©Danita Delimont



100 African Women Leading Africa's Water & Sanitation Future

First Edition | 2026

Published Jointly By:

The African Water and Sanitation Association (AfWASA)
Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN)

Disclaimer

The ideas and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors; they are not necessarily those of RWSN or AfWASA and therefore do not commit the organisations. The contents were contributed by WASH sector stakeholders. RWSN and AfWASA are not responsible for errors in the content provided or for discrepancies in data and content between contributed chapters.

Copyright & Reproduction

© 2026. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means: including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods without the prior written permission of the publishers, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law.

Data Citation Notice

When referencing data or content from this publication, please cite it as follows:
100 African Women Leading Africa's Water & Sanitation Future. First Edition. AfWASA & RWSN, 2026.

Visual Credits

Front Cover Photography: © Aida Muluneh Studio, from the Water Life series.

aidamuluneh.com/water-life

Editorial & Design

Authored and compiled by Euphresia Luseka, with contributions from WASH sector stakeholders. Layout and design also by Euphresia Luseka.

Produced in Nairobi, Kenya.

Correspondence

For inquiries, please contact the Secretariat of AfWASA or RWSN.



CONTENTS

I-VI

FOREWORD

Foreword from AFWASA and RWSN Leadership. Founders Message sharing insights, motivations, and the guiding principles behind the Compendium. Acknowledgements.

01-04

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and structure. Policy context of WASH and gender equality. Principles, concepts and frameworks

05-07

AWARDS GOVERNANCE CRITERIA

Selection Process. The Jury. Fact sheet on WASH and Gender in Africa

08-69

THE 100 AFRICAN WOMEN LEADING AFRICA'S WASH FUTURE

Profiles are listed in 8 Leadership Categories: Legacy. Government & Public Sector. Systems Strengthening. Innovators & Entrepreneurs. Research, Academia & Knowledge. Development, Civil Society & Advocacy. Media, Arts & Storytelling. Community & Grassroots.

70-106

CONCLUSION

Reflections. Call to Action. Directory of Honorees. References.



ABOUT THE FOUNDERS

Euphresia Luseka | Kenya
Co-Thematic Lead, RWSN



Euphresia Luseka is a Co-Founder of the African Women in WASH Awards (AWIWA) and a multi-award-winning Water Governance and Markets Systems Development specialist whose work is helping redefine the future of water and sanitation across Africa. With over 16 years of experience spanning 25 countries, she is recognised as a bold strategist who works at the intersection of policy, financing, resource mobilisation, institutional strengthening, business development support and systems reform. She has advised national and sub-national governments, water utilities, and development partners on how to build stronger, accountable, more financially sustainable, and more inclusive WASH systems, especially at a time when global aid to the sector is within the International Water Association and Strategic Council member at AfWASA, she continues to champion gender equity in the sector. A published researcher, mentor, and changemaker, Euphresia is not only strengthening institutions, she is opening space for African women to lead them.

Dr. Leticia Ackun | Ghana
Gender Specialist, AFWASA



Dr. Leticia Ackun is a Co-Founder of the African Women in WASH Awards and a distinguished WASH governance, gender, and public health specialist whose work has transformed lives and systems across Africa for over 25 years. With a unique foundation in nursing, development studies, and sociology, she has consistently bridged policy and practice—turning complex challenges into measurable improvements in health, sanitation, and community wellbeing. She pioneered the Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approach in Ghana, contributing to a national shift that significantly reduced open defecation and increased access to household sanitation. Her leadership has also advanced gender-responsive WASH solutions, improving school retention for girls and strengthening community ownership of water systems. Through her work with institutions such as AfWASA, UNICEF, and national agencies, she has influenced policy, built capacity, and expanded women’s representation in the sector. Through the Awards, Dr. Ackun is ensuring that African women driving change in WASH are recognized, celebrated, and elevated.



FOREWORD

Turning Pivotal Moments into Lasting Progress

The future of Africa is being written in the language of water and that language is profoundly female. African challenges require African-led solutions and through the African Women in WASH Awards and this compendium we are proud to celebrate 100 changemakers securing Africa's WASH future.

To understand the leaders recognised in these pages we must return to the rivers, wells, forests and fertile soils from which their leadership grows. African women's leadership is not a modern intervention or an imported concept. It is woven into the continent's history and culture. Across centuries women have safeguarded water sources, defended sovereignty, managed ecosystems and shaped the social and economic life of their communities. Africa's progress has always been inseparable from the courage, strategy and vision of its women.

History offers enduring examples. Ghana's Yaa Asantewaa led the War of the Golden Stool to defend political authority and the forests and water sources vital to her people's survival. Amina of Zaria in Nigeria expanded her kingdom by securing wells and river trade routes that sustained regional commerce. Nzinga Mbande of Angola protected river systems and wetlands as defensive strongholds against colonial encroachment. More recently Wangari Maathai a Kenyan, demonstrated the transformative power of women's environmental leadership. Through the Green Belt Movement, she mobilised communities to restore forests, protect watersheds and empower women as custodians of ecological resilience.

These women were not symbols. They were architects of environmental governance, political sovereignty and economic stability. Their legacy continues to shape leadership across Africa's WASH sector today. African women have also been critical in global milestones for gender equality. The World Conference on Women (1985) catalysed new strategies for collective action and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) set a global framework for advancing women's rights. These milestones affirm that gender equality is not simply aspirational, it is fundamental to sustainable development.

Nowhere is this more visible than in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector (WASH). Water and sanitation systems intersect public health, climate resilience, food security, energy production and economic development. Every decision about these systems shapes the lives of millions of households. Yet leadership in these systems has often remained narrow.

Across Africa's 54 countries, women head only 17 per cent of national ministries responsible for water and sanitation. Regional trends show uneven representation: West and Southern Africa average 20 per cent, North Africa 17 per cent, East Africa 14 per cent, and Central Africa 11 per cent. Across water sector institutions women hold between 9 and 24 per cent of leadership positions. In utilities women represent roughly 26 per cent of employees, but only 22 per cent of engineers and 14 per cent of technicians. Among Africa's 11 major transboundary water organisations only one is led by a woman.

This is a structural paradox. Women remain the primary managers of water and sanitation within households and communities. They collect water, maintain hygiene, manage sanitation facilities and safeguard family health. Their knowledge is practical, lived and deeply connected to community wellbeing. Yet those who interact most closely with these systems remain underrepresented in the institutions that design, finance and govern them. Women working in the sector face additional challenges: unequal pay, limited career progression, unsafe working environments, sextortion, and inadequate WASH infrastructure such as toilets or health protections. In rural communities, where more than 60 per cent of Africa's population lives, access to education, safe sanitation and social support can limit professional mobility. These are structural barriers, not personal shortcomings.

At the same time, we have learned from the women we engaged that readiness and opportunity must go hand in hand. When women are supported with mentorship, networks, resources and spaces to lead, their expertise transforms institutions, strengthens governance, and improves outcomes for communities. The



World Bank Gender Strategy and other frameworks confirm that deliberate, sustained investment in women's leadership produces measurable change.

Leadership is the story. Across Africa, women are already transforming the WASH sector. They are leading utilities serving millions, designing climate-resilient infrastructure, advancing sanitation research, mobilising investments, and shaping governance reforms. They are ministers drafting policy, engineers building adaptive systems, researchers innovating sanitation technologies, financiers structuring investments, journalists documenting inequities, artists and filmmakers shaping public awareness, and grassroots leaders safeguarding community water systems and ecological knowledge.

These women are not simply entering systems designed without them in mind. They are reshaping them. Their leadership strengthens governance, amplifies accountability and connects institutions to communities. This represents a new architecture of equality, where structural change accompanies representation.

This compendium exists because too many of these stories remain undocumented. Too many African Women In WASH remain behind the scenes. Engaging with these women revealed a shared truth: rarely have they been asked to tell their stories, despite decades of impact. Many spoke with emotion, not because their work is new, but because recognition has been rare. Again and again, one woman led to another, revealing networks of leadership that are strong, but too often invisible.

This is why this publication matters. For the first time, we bring together 100 African women leading across the full spectrum of the WASH sector from every country in the continent. It reflects the diversity of leadership shaping Africa today, from youth leaders to ministers, from engineers to activists, from researchers to artists. It is both recognition and record, but also a correction, ensuring that the narrative of Africa's water sector reflects the reality of who is building it.

In this context, 2026 events presents both urgency and alignment. The convergence of World Water Day and International Women's Day reinforces the inseparable link between gender justice and water security, with global and continental institutions including Africa Union, UN Water and UN Women advancing a shared rights-based agenda where safe water and sanitation access underpins health, safety, and leadership. Yet the structural gap remains clear: women, despite being central WASH management, are still underrepresented in the systems that govern it. This compendium was therefore established to respond to this gap and more, creating a structured, Africa-led mechanism to identify, document, and amplify women's leadership across the WASH value chain.

Recognition at continental level matters because visibility shapes influence, influence shapes policy, and policy shapes systems. This compendium serves as both record and instrument while contributing to the broader development agenda articulated through Agenda 2063 particularly Aspiration 6, which calls for a people-driven Africa that unleashes the full potential of women and youth and aligning with the Africa Water Vision, whose 2026 focus on sustainable water availability and safe sanitation systems provides the sectoral framework for achieving these aspirations.

Now, the challenge is on how we must act. That is why we co-founded the African Women in WASH Awards. We must mentor, build alliances, amplify each other's voices, and claim influence where decisions are made. By doing so, women in WASH can transform not just the sector, but the rules of the game, turning participation into real gains for ourselves, our peers, and the communities we serve.

This publication stands as both recognition and record. May it inspire future generations and strengthen the networks of leadership that will ensure water security, resilience and dignity across Africa.

Euphresia Luseka and Leticia Ackun
Founders, African Women in WASH Awards and Compendium





Credit: naturepl.com



LEAD AFRICAN WOMEN LEADING AFRICA'S WASH FUTURE 2026

MESSAGE FROM AFRICAN WATER AND SANITATION ASSOCIATION (AfWASA)

François Olivier Gosso, Executive Director

Water is life. Across Africa, it is women who have long carried the responsibility of securing that life for households and communities. They collect water, safeguard hygiene, and sustain families and local economies. Yet, for too long, their leadership has remained under-recognised in the institutions that design, manage, and govern water systems.

The African Women in WASH Compendium of 100 Women in WASH exist to correct this imbalance. AfWASA is proud to have served as the Continental Convener and Institutional Anchor of this initiative, working alongside partners to bring visibility, recognition, and opportunity to women whose contributions have too often remained unseen.

Across our membership of utilities and sanitation operators in all 54 African countries, a clear pattern has emerged. Women are central to water use and management yet remain underrepresented in the workforce and leadership.

They account for approximately 26% of employees, with only 17% in senior management, and just over one fifth in technical roles such as engineering and operations. These figures reflect not a lack of capability, but a system that has not fully opened pathways for women to lead.

AfWASA joined this initiative to help close this leadership gap. Through our network, we identified and elevated women who are already shaping the sector, many of them working beyond visibility despite delivering impact at scale. By hosting the inaugural African Women In WASH awards at our 23rd International Congress in Yaoundé, we placed these leaders on a continental and global stage, engaging ministers, development partners, and sector leaders in recognising their work and potential. This effort builds on AfWASA's broader commitment to advance gender equality across WASH sector. Since 2021, we have implemented targeted actions to address systemic barriers that limit women's participation and progression. These include establishing 11 gender focal persons and committees within utilities, coordination of 18 women professional networks, supporting development of gender-responsive policies and human resource frameworks, and strengthening leadership pathways for women and young professionals.

Through mentorship programmes, professional networks, and capacity-building initiatives, we have supported hundreds of women across multiple countries to strengthen their technical expertise, leadership confidence, and visibility. Women Professional Networks now operate across the continent, creating spaces for peer learning, mentorship, and advocacy, while outreach initiatives are inspiring girls to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and the WASH sector. Equally important has been the shift in how the sector understands leadership. This initiative moves beyond viewing women as beneficiaries of water services to recognising them as engineers, managers, policymakers, and change-makers. It also engages male leaders as champions of inclusion, recognising that institutional transformation requires collective responsibility.

This compendium is therefore not a standalone moment of recognition. They are part of a broader effort to transform systems, strengthen leadership pipelines, and embed gender equality into the core of how utilities and institutions operate. The accompanying call for action through the Yaoundé Declaration on Gender in WASH reflects this commitment, encouraging concrete steps towards more inclusive leadership across the sector. The women featured in this compendium represent excellence, resilience, and innovation. They are leading utilities, shaping policy, advancing research, and transforming service delivery in both urban and rural contexts. Their stories demonstrate what is possible when talent is recognised, supported, and given space to lead.

AfWASA remains committed to scaling this work in the years ahead. By strengthening partnerships, expanding mentorship and professional networks, and embedding gender-responsive approaches across institutions, we will continue to support a water sector that is more inclusive, more effective, and better equipped to serve all communities. To the women recognised here, we extend our deepest appreciation. Your leadership is shaping Africa's WASH future. To our members and partners, we thank you for your commitment to this shared vision. This compendium is both recognition and record. More importantly, it is a signal of the future we are building; one where women are not at the margins of the water sector, but at its centre, leading the way.



MESSAGE FROM RURAL WATER SUPPLY NETWORK, (RWSN)

Dr. James Origa, Chair, Executive Committee.

The Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN) is proud to support the African Women in WASH Awards and this Compendium of 100 African Women Leading Africa's WASH Future. Our engagement with this initiative reflects RWSN's long-standing commitment to advancing gender-responsive and inclusive rural WASH governance across the continent.

The need for this commitment is clear from the scale and persistence of WASH inequities in Africa. Despite rapid urbanisation, 62% of the continent's population, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, continues to live in rural areas where access to WASH services remains most limited. According to the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme report, only 53% of rural households in Sub-Saharan Africa have access to basic drinking water services. Sanitation coverage is growing more slowly than the population, and hygiene gains remain uneven across regions. Sub-Saharan Africa bears a disproportionate share of the global WASH deficit, accounting for the majority of the estimated 703 million people worldwide who still lack even basic drinking water services and is home to some of the lowest rates of safely managed sanitation coverage in the world.



These disparities are not gender-neutral. Across the continent, women and girls bear a disproportionate share of the burden as they are responsible for collecting water, often walking long distances, taking time away from education, economic participation, and community engagement. Adolescent girls face additional barriers, including missed school days due to inadequate menstrual hygiene facilities. In rural healthcare settings, limited access to WASH further exposes women, particularly as primary caregivers, to heightened health risks and deepened poverty. These are not isolated hardships but structural conditions that constrain women's agency and perpetuate intergenerational inequality.

It is within this context that RWSN's engagement with the 1st African Women in WASH Awards and this Compendium should be understood. Through its Leave No One Behind thematic area, RWSN works to ensure that monitoring, planning, and service delivery reflect the realities of marginalised populations, particularly women in rural, remote, and conflict-affected or fragile settings. This approach reflects a core conviction that gender equality in rural WASH is not a peripheral concern but a precondition for effective WASH governance and sustainable service delivery.

RWSN has advanced this conviction through concrete and sustained initiatives. These include a global mentorship program supporting women professionals across the WASH sector, the development of operational guidance on integrating gender equality into rural water supply planning and delivery, and targeted advocacy to address structural barriers, including inequitable participation in decision-making and the abuse of power within service delivery systems that continue to limit women's advancement and safety in the sector. Together, these efforts have contributed to strengthening women's technical capacity, increasing their representation at professional and institutional levels, and shifting organisational practices.

This Compendium builds on that foundation by shifting focus from inequity to leadership and impact. The women featured here are not only responding to WASH challenges in their communities, but are also shaping systems, influencing policy, and driving innovation across the continent. Their work reflects a depth of expertise and lived experience that has too often gone un-recognised in formal professional and institutional spaces. By documenting and celebrating these 100 remarkable women, this publication makes visible a network of leadership that is essential to Africa's WASH future. It highlights the technical knowledge, community-driven solutions, and institutional influence women bring to the sector, while reinforcing importance of inclusive and gender-responsive approaches to sustainable service delivery. In this sense, the Compendium is more than a record of individual achievement; it is an evidence base for the kind of leadership that African WASH systems need more of.

We extend our sincere appreciation to all the women featured in this Compendium for sharing their experiences, expertise, and insights. We also acknowledge the editorial, research, and administrative teams whose dedication made this publication possible. Their collective efforts ensure that these stories are not only recorded but positioned to inform policy, practice, and future leadership across the sector.

RWSN's commitment remains clear: to strengthen rural water governance, champion gender-responsive leadership, and ensure that the voices of women shaping WASH systems across Africa are recognised, valued, and amplified. In honouring these 100 African women, this Compendium not only reflects progress but also sets a direction for a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future for water, sanitation, and hygiene across the continent.

[The views expressed in this message are those of the author in his personal capacity as Chair of the RWSN Global Executive Committee and do not necessarily represent the views of the World Bank Group or its Executive Directors]





Credit: Pupu-Pump Ltd. Madagascar

Africa's sanitation crisis is also an economic story; one where gender has long dictated who earns, who risks, and who remains invisible. For women in the informal sanitation sector, the numbers have never added up. Manual pit emptying is not only dangerous; it is poorly paid, irregular, and exploitative. Women often earned less than their male counterparts, despite facing greater stigma and risk. Without access to capital or equipment, they were locked into the lowest rung of the value chain- doing the hardest work for the smallest returns. The arrival of technologies like the PuPu Pump is beginning to rewrite that equation. By mechanizing waste removal, the pump transforms sanitation from survival labour into a viable business. Through lease-to-own models, women can now access equipment that was once out of reach, allowing them to charge higher fees, serve more customers, and build stable enterprises. Income becomes predictable. Work becomes scalable. Across the continent, this shift is taking root. In Kisumu and Nakuru in Kenya, women-led enterprises are using the pump to serve tens of thousands of households. In Lusaka, Zambia and BurkinaFaso although progress is gradual, women are entering roles once closed to them. In Ethiopia, local production initiatives are lowering costs and expanding access, with a strong focus on women entrepreneurs. This is more than technology adoption-it is economic redefinition. The PuPu Pump is not just clearing waste; it is clearing pathways for women to move from informal, undervalued labor into ownership, leadership, and financial independence.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The realisation of this inaugural compendium is a testament to the power of collective action. We recognise that visibility is a collective project, and we are profoundly grateful to the institutions and individuals who provided the evidence, insight, and platform to make the invisible visible.

Strong institutions create space for women to lead, and this compendium demonstrates how recognition and collaboration can generate lasting impact.

The publication was made possible through the steadfast support of the African Water and Sanitation Association (AfWASA) and the Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN). These institutions form the backbone of this continental celebration, demonstrating how strong allies can intentionally create space for women to excel and shape the future of Africa's water sector.

AfWASA anchors this initiative as Africa's leading WASH sector institution, providing legitimacy, authority, and continuity by embedding it within its governance structure and Congress platform. Through AfWASA's stewardship, the compendium gains continental convening authority and visibility across member utilities and institutions. Parallel to this, RWSN brings global expertise in rural water services and last-mile service delivery, ensuring the compendium leaves no-one behind by meaningfully recognising women working in underserved and rural contexts while supporting mentorship and legacy programmes that link established leaders with rising stars.

This inaugural edition was made possible through the institutional stewardship of Olivier Gosso, Executive Director, AfWASA, and Sean Furey, Director, RWSN.

We also appreciate the invaluable contributions of the jury and all contributors who supported the delivery of this compendium. This work is dedicated to the courage, vision, and resilience of the 100 African women transforming the WASH sector: policy-makers, innovators, activists, researchers, financiers and so on, whose dedication ensures access to safe water,

sanitation, and hygiene for communities across the continent. Their tireless efforts, often unseen, form the foundation of sustainable development and gender equity in Africa.

We are deeply grateful to Kim Worsham, Ruth Sylvester, Georgia McWilliams, and Euphresia Luseka, whose pioneering research on diversity and leadership in SDG 6 disruptively provided critical insights into representation, inclusion, and the systemic barriers women face in the WASH sector. We further acknowledge Prof. Grace Oluwasanya Policy Brief on Women in Africa's Water Leadership. These 2 research pieces provide the critical baseline for our current continental progress.

The visual soul of this publication is defined by the world-renowned artist Aïda Muluneh. We are honoured to feature imagery from her Water Life series, which brings to light the daily burden of water collection and the resilience of women across African communities. Her art is both a mirror and a call to action, reflecting the dignity and human stories behind global WASH challenges. We also honour the words of Maya Angelou (1978), whose poem *Woman Work* captures the endless labour, strength, and grace of women balancing countless responsibilities. Her verse echoes in the lives of the African women featured in this compendium- women who rise each day to confront monumental challenges with unwavering determination.

Finally, we recognise all the women celebrated here, from policymakers and engineers to community champions and grassroots activists. Their leadership, creativity, and persistence illuminate the path towards a future where access to WASH is a universal reality. It is to them that this work belongs.





Credit: Arne Hoel



100 AFRICAN WOMEN LEADING AFRICA'S WASH FUTURE 2026

INTRODUCTION

African Women Are Securing the Future of WASH

Leadership. Innovation. Impact.

Water is life. Sanitation is dignity. They fuel health, education, food security, and livelihoods. Yet billions around the world still lack access to safe water and sanitation. Across Africa, women and girls bear the heaviest burden; walking miles for water, managing households, and caring for families often at the expense of their education, careers, and civic engagement. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises the vital link between WASH and gender equality. SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation and SDG 5 on gender equality emphasise that universal access is impossible without women leading and shaping decisions. Gender equality in WASH is not just a goal; it is a necessity for sustainable development and social justice.

A Continent of Contrasts

In Africa, the story of water and sanitation is inseparable from the story of women. Most African countries are predominantly rural, and WASH coverage lags behind global averages. JMP (2024–2025) reports that only 53% of rural households have access to basic drinking water, with sanitation and hygiene services far from universal. Women and girls continue to carry the burden: fetching water from distant sources, managing domestic care, and navigating unsafe sanitation facilities. Leadership in WASH mirrors these inequalities. UN University data reveals that:

- Only 17% of African ministries responsible for water and sanitation are headed by women.
- 13% of top educational institutions in water and sanitation are led by women.
- Only 1 of 11 transboundary water organizations has female leadership.
- Even in low-income countries where women hold 24% of water ministry leadership roles, representation remains fragile and uneven.

Even where women hold leadership roles, representation remains fragile and uneven. These statistics tell a clear story: Africa cannot achieve universal WASH access without empowering and investing in women leaders.

The Leadership Imperative

African women constitute half of the continent's population, and their participation in decision-making is a matter of human rights, justice, and development. Leadership by women has a ripple effect: it increases inclusion in other sectors, inspires future generations and ensures that policies and interventions reflect the realities of those most affected. Across governance, business, civil society, and WASH, African women are transforming lives. Without formal leadership training, many have applied their local knowledge, lived experience, and innovative approaches to design solutions that advance gender equality, improve service delivery, and foster sustainable communities. African women's leadership creates a ripple effect:

1. Women are entitled to participate fully in policy, law, and program implementation.
2. Their leadership creates a multiplier effect, influencing other sectors to include more women.
3. Girls and young women require role models to foster aspirations and pursue meaningful careers.

Redefining WASH and Gender

WASH efforts have traditionally focused on expanding access to water and sanitation services. While essential, access alone is not sufficient to ensure sustainable and equitable outcomes. Effective systems also depend on inclusive decision-making, fair resource allocation, and services that reflect the needs of all users. Gender equality is therefore central to WASH performance. Where women are excluded from governance and implementation, services often fail to address community realities. Where women participate in leadership, outcomes are more inclusive and sustainable. Three approaches guide this shift:

- Gender-sensitive: Identifies inequalities
- Gender-responsive: Addresses them through policy and practice
- Gender-transformative: Tackles underlying structural and social barriers



Across Africa, women are advancing these approaches by strengthening governance and improving service delivery. Their leadership demonstrates that sustainable WASH systems require not only technical solutions, but also inclusive and equitable frameworks.

Frameworks That Enable Change

This compendium is grounded in the understanding that gender equality is central to achieving sustainable WASH outcomes. It refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of all people in accessing, managing, and benefiting from water and sanitation services, including participation in decision-making and governance. Closely linked is women's empowerment; the ability of women to exercise agency, make decisions, and influence systems. Across many African contexts, socially constructed roles continue to shape who collects water, who makes decisions, and who benefits from investments. These structural dynamics often limit women's participation, even as they remain at the centre of WASH systems in households and communities. In documenting the experiences and leadership of African women, this compendium draws on three complementary approaches:

- Gender-sensitive, which identifies existing inequalities
- Gender-responsive, which addresses these through targeted actions
- Gender-transformative, which seeks to change the underlying structures that sustain inequality

Together, these approaches provide a practical framework for understanding and advancing women's leadership in WASH. They also reinforce a central message of this compendium: that sustainable water and sanitation systems require not only technical solutions, but inclusive, equitable, and context-responsive approaches shaped by the leadership of African women.

Legal and Policy Foundations

African women constitute half of the continent's population, and their participation in decision-making is a matter of human rights, justice, and development. Leadership by women has a ripple effect: it increases inclusion in other sectors, inspires future generations, and ensures that policies and interventions reflect the realities of those most affected. Across Africa, women's leadership in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) is anchored

Global instruments such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5 & 6) affirm women's rights, participation, and access to essential services. At the continental level, the Maputo Protocol, Agenda 2063, and the AU Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Strategy 2018–2028 place women's leadership, dignity, and economic participation at the heart of Africa's development agenda. These instruments create legitimacy, accountability, and a clear mandate for inclusion across all sectors, including WASH. They set expectations for representation, equitable decision-making, and systemic change.

This compendium adopts a gender-transformative perspective, recognising that WASH outcomes are shaped not just by infrastructure, but by who participates in governance, how resources are allocated, and whether services respond to real community needs. It also recognises the diversity of African women's experiences—differences in geography, age, and socio-economic context all influence participation and access. Effective systems must connect water to broader outcomes in health, education, livelihoods, and resilience.

The key lesson is clear: sustainable WASH systems are built not only through technical expertise, but through leadership, inclusion, and equity. Across Africa, women are advancing this approach—strengthening institutions, shaping policy, and delivering services that reflect the realities of those they serve.

Purpose of the Compendium

100 African Women Leading Africa's Water & Sanitation Future is more than a publication; it is a defining record of leadership at a pivotal moment for the continent. It brings together the stories of 100 exceptional women whose work is transforming how water and sanitation systems are designed, governed, financed, and sustained across Africa. In a strong foundation of international and continental commitments. These frameworks establish gender equality and inclusion as essential principles; not optional considerations, for governance, development, and service delivery.

The compendium was created to correct a long-standing imbalance in how the sector has been documented. For decades, women have been



central to the management, protection, and delivery of water and sanitation services, yet their contributions have often remained invisible in formal histories, policy discourse, and investment narratives. By documenting their work in one authoritative volume, this publication establishes a lasting record of their impact and expertise.

At the same time, it reclaims authorship of Africa's water narrative by centering African women as knowledge producers, innovators, and decision-makers. Their stories provide a grounded, evidence-based account of what effective, inclusive, and context-responsive WASH leadership looks like in practice; shifting the lens from externally framed accounts of need to locally driven models of solution and resilience.

The compendium also serves as a catalyst for change within the sector. By elevating these leaders as visible and credible actors, it challenges entrenched assumptions about who leads in WASH and sets a new benchmark for representation in governance, research, and public platforms. It offers policymakers, development partners, and institutions a concrete reference point for identifying and engaging women leaders in meaningful and sustained ways.

Beyond recognition, the publication aims to influence how resources flow within the sector. By presenting women-led initiatives as proven, scalable, and investment-ready, it seeks to close the persistent gap between acknowledgment and financing, encouraging funders and governments to direct greater support toward solutions shaped and implemented by women.

The compendium also lays the foundation for a growing pan-African network of women working across the WASH ecosystem. By bringing these leaders into one shared space, it fosters opportunities for collaboration, peer learning, and collective advocacy- strengthening their ability to shape regional and continental agendas.

Equally important is its role in shaping future leadership. By capturing the journeys, strategies, and lessons of these women, the publication becomes a resource for intergenerational knowledge transfer. It provides emerging professionals and students with tangible role models and clearer pathways into leadership,

research, and technical practice within the sector. Underlying this work is a broader reality: across Africa, women and girls continue to carry a disproportionate share of the burden associated with inadequate water and sanitation services, from water collection to unpaid care responsibilities. This compendium therefore shifts the narrative from women as beneficiaries of development to women as architects of systemic change- engineers, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and community leaders whose decisions shape outcomes at every level.

Ultimately, 100 African Women Leading Africa's Water & Sanitation Future is both a celebration and a strategic tool. It honours achievement while actively influencing how the future of WASH is imagined, funded, and governed. In doing so, it makes a clear and compelling case: sustainable and equitable water systems in Africa depend on recognising, supporting, and investing in women's leadership.





Credit: BASEFlow Malawi

By including these voices, the compendium underscores that advancing women’s leadership is a shared responsibility, requiring collective commitment and partnership. The publication concludes with Commitment and the Way Forward, which synthesizes key insights and sets out a forward-looking agenda. It highlights lessons learned, identifies opportunities for action, and calls on stakeholders: governments, institutions, funders, and communities to strengthen their commitment to inclusive leadership and equitable water governance.

Guiding Principles

This compendium is anchored in a set of core principles that inform its analysis and vision:

- Gender roles and relations are diverse and continuously evolving across contexts
- Barriers to women’s leadership are structural, social, and economic and must be addressed at multiple levels
- Evidence-based, sex-disaggregated data is critical for understanding disparities and driving effective solutions
- Inclusive development requires a firm commitment to equity, participation, and shared benefit

INSIDE THE COMPENDIUM

100 African Women Leading Africa’s Water & Sanitation Future Compendium is designed as a layered narrative—bringing together context, evidence, and lived experience to present a holistic picture of leadership and transformation in the WASH sector.

The compendium opens with an Introduction that serves as both foundation and framing. It outlines the purpose of the publication, presents key facts and figures on water access and gender disparities, and situates Africa within the global WASH landscape. This section also integrates the conceptual and policy grounding of the work—exploring gender equality, women’s empowerment, and the operational approaches that shape inclusive WASH systems, alongside the international and regional frameworks that support them. Together, this opening section establishes the context, urgency, and direction of the compendium linking data, policy, and principle to the lived realities of women across the continent. At its core is Women of Impact, which brings together 100 profiles of African women leading change across the sector. Spanning diverse geographies and disciplines, these leaders are advancing innovation, influencing policy, strengthening institutions, and expanding opportunities for others. Their stories form the heart of the publication—demonstrating not only what leadership looks like, but how it is practiced in real-world contexts. This is followed by Voices from Allies, a section that broadens the conversation beyond individual profiles. It features perspectives from both men and women leaders across regions, sectors, and backgrounds who are actively supporting gender equality in WASH.

At its core is a clear conviction; equity drives sustainability, leadership drives change and women drive both. Africa’s water future has a face and a voice. It is the woman who walks miles at dawn. The engineer designing resilient systems. The policymaker shaping national priorities. The leader mentoring the next generation and many more. This compendium brings them together not as isolated stories, but as a collective force for transformation.

Africa is not waiting.
Its women are already leading.



AWARDS GOVERNANCE CRITERIA

1. SELECTION PROCESS

The 100 African Women Leading Africa's Water & Sanitation Future for 2026 were identified through a six-month research and verification process guided by transparency, merit, and continental representation. The aim was to document, profile, and recognise African women whose leadership, innovation, and advocacy are transforming water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) systems across Africa. The process combined open nominations, independent research, sector consultation, and expert review, ensuring the final list reflects the diversity, expertise, and impact of women across the WASH ecosystem. This compendium celebrates exceptional women leaders across Africa who are transforming access to WASH. While this list highlights many remarkable contributions, it represents a selection rather than the full spectrum of talent in the sector. We warmly encourage additional nominations to ensure that every leader making a difference in WASH is recognised. This publication aims to document and celebrate achievements, providing visibility and inspiration to others, and demonstrating the extraordinary impact of women across the continent. By shining a light on their work, we hope to inspire a new generation of leaders to drive innovation, strengthen governance, and expand access to sustainable WASH access across Africa.

- Targeted outreach was conducted to ensure representation across all African countries addressing long-standing gaps in the documentation of women's leadership.
- All nominations underwent an initial verification process to confirm eligibility and ensure the integrity of the review process: African nationality, Professional engagement in the WASH sector, Completeness and accuracy of submitted documentation. Only submissions meeting these criteria progressed to the formal evaluation stage.



01

Nominations & Eligibility Criteria

Eligible candidates progressed to an expert evaluation stage. Submissions assessed using a standardised, weighted scoring framework designed to capture both leadership and measurable impact. Evaluation considered: Demonstrated and measurable sector impact, Leadership influence within institutions or communities, Innovation and scalability of solutions, Sustainability, Contributions to gender equity and sector transformation and mentorship and leadership development.

02

Expert Evaluation

This compendium was designed to meet high standards of transparency, independence, and credibility.

Oversight safeguards included:

- Independent, global jury
- Geographic and sectoral diversity
- Gender-balanced evaluation panel
- Conflict-of-interest declarations
- Standardised weighted scoring matrix

These safeguards ensured the evaluation process remained objective, balanced, and credible, underpinning the legitimacy of the final selection.



03

Governance, Oversight & Jury Review

Following jury assessment, shortlisted candidates underwent final editorial verification and profile documentation to confirm professional achievements, sector influence, and contributions. The final 100 African Women Leading Africa's Water & Sanitation Future list reflects leadership across the breadth of Africa's WASH ecosystem- demonstrating the diverse pathways through which women are strengthening WASH systems across the continent.

04

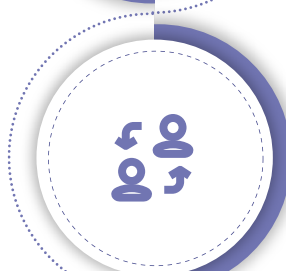
Final Selection & Editorial Validation

Recognising women aged 18 and above from all 54 African countries, this listing celebrates the full ecosystem of African leadership in water, sanitation, and hygiene. It includes Government & Public Sector Leaders, Pioneers & Policy Leaders, Community & Grassroots Champions (including Indigenous Leaders), Innovators & Entrepreneurs, Researchers & Academics, NGO Leaders and Activists, Media, Filmmakers & Storytellers, Funders & Philanthropists, showcasing the women driving transformation across local, national, regional, and global contexts.



05

Recognition Categories



AWARDS GOVERNANCE CRITERIA

1. THE JURY

The 100 African Women Leading Africa's Water & Sanitation Future list was guided by an independent, African and Global jury composed of 24 high-level, influential, and highly respected senior experts from across the Water and Sanitation ecosystem. The jury brought together leaders from diverse sub-sectors: including utilities, policy and governance, research and academia, philanthropy, entrepreneurship, civil society, media, United Nations and multilateral institutions; ensuring that evaluation reflected both technical rigor and sector-wide credibility. Notably, jurors confirmed their participation on very short notice, demonstrating strong confidence in the integrity and relevance of the initiative and a shared commitment to elevating excellence in Africa's WASH sector. Careful attention was given to achieving regional balance across the continent, gender

balance, youth representation, and broad sectoral diversity. This deliberate composition strengthened the legitimacy of the selection process and ensured that different contextual realities and professional lenses informed deliberations. To safeguard fairness and consistency, each category was assessed by three or more jury members using defined evaluation criteria. Conflict-of-interest protocols were formally applied, and the review process was conducted independently of sponsorship considerations or institutional influence. The result was a rigorous, transparent, and merit-based selection process befitting a continental platform dedicated to recognising leadership and excellence in Africa's WASH sector.

We are deeply grateful to:



Amanda Loeffen
CEO, Human Rights 2
Water



Anjani Kapoor
Head of Policy,
Sanitation and Water for All



Antonella Vagliente
Senior Programs Manager



Ashmeet Kharbanda
Youth Focal Point,
GWOPA, UN Habitat



Dorcas Muga
Health & Gender Editor,
Nation Media Group



Dr.-Ing. Dahlia Sabri
IWRA



Dr. Francine Abiola
Senior Lecturer and
Advisor , University of
Abomey



Dr. Fungai Makoni
Senior Director,
Operations, World Vision
Intl.





Dr. Hadeeel Hosney
Lecturer, IHE Delft



Dr. Jeniffer Molwantwa
CEO, Water Research
Commission



Dr. Najib Batenganya
Deputy Director, WASH
Bill & Melinda Gates
Foundation



Emmanuel Uguru
Policy & MEL Officer,
African Ministers Council
Of Water (AMCOW)



Eng. Francis Musinguzi
Regional Director Africa,
Water.Org



Eng. Kariuki Mugo
Lead Policy Analyst-WASH
Governance, WaterAid



Florence Laker
Senior Officer, Sanitation,
International Water
Association (IWA)



Franziska Volk
Programme Management
Officer, GWOPA, UN
Habitat



Haja Isatu Bah
Founder and Social
Entrepreneur,
Uman4Uman



Hon. Dr. Esther Muinjangu
Deputy Minister,
Ministry of Health and
Social Services, Namibia



John Mutebe
Programmes Manager,
Water and Sanitation
Entrepreneurs, Uganda



Kitchinme Bawa
Executive Secretary
Pan-African Association of
Sanitation Actors



Lena Musoka
Associate, FLUSH Llc.



Prof. Grace Oluwasanya
Senior Reseacher, United
Nations University



Rebecca Sands
Programme Lead, Water
Integrity Network



Vida Duti
Country Director, IRC
WASH





BY THE NUMBERS

THE STATE OF GENDER AND WASH IN AFRICA

The Time Tax: Water Collection & Labor

Women and girls in Africa spend enormous amounts of time securing water, impacting health, education, and the economy.

- **40 Billion Hours Annually:** Women in Sub-Saharan Africa spend roughly 40 billion hours each year collecting water—equivalent to the annual labor force of France. (UNICEF 2024; UNESCO 2026)
- **Primary Responsibility:** In 70–76% of rural households, women and girls are the main water collectors; men do 7–14% of the work. (WHO/UNICEF JMP 2025)
- **Distance & Time:** In Malawi and Kenya, women spend 30 minutes to 4 hours per trip, often sacrificing income-generating work. (UNESCO 2026)
- **Economic Impact:** This “unpaid water work” equates to ~77 million lost working days annually, limiting agricultural and economic productivity. (FAO 2025)

Health & Education: Maternal Mortality & Menstrual Barriers

Unsafe water and inadequate sanitation directly affect women’s health and girls’ education.

- **Maternal Mortality:** Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 70% of global maternal deaths, with a maternal mortality ratio of 545 per 100,000 live births. (WHO Regional Committee for Africa 2025)
- **Sepsis Risk:** 76% of births occur in facilities lacking basic water and soap, contributing to high maternal and newborn sepsis rates. (WHO/UNICEF 2024)
- **School Absenteeism:** Over 50% of adolescent girls in countries like Chad, Ethiopia, and Uganda miss school during menstruation due to lack of private, functional sanitation facilities. (UNICEF 2025)
- **Menstrual Health Gaps:** Only ~31% of rural African schools provide private, usable WASH facilities for menstrual management, compared to 39% globally. (WHO/UNICEF JMP 2024)

Economic & Agricultural Gaps

Gender disparities in access to water translate into measurable economic losses and productivity gaps.

- **Agricultural Productivity:** Women provide ~49% of the agrifood labour force, yet cereal production is 46–47% lower than men’s due to lack of irrigation, water rights, and inputs—not skill. (FAO 2025)
- **Yield Potential:** Equal access to water and resources could increase farm yields by 20–30%, potentially reducing hunger by 17%. (FAO 2025)
- **Leadership Gap:** Women lead only 17% of national water ministries, with lowest representation in East and Central Africa. (WHO/UNICEF JMP 2025)
- **Infrastructure Investment Gap:** Funding the \$11 billion needed to pipe water to every African home would require only 25 days of total continental debt service. (African Union Commission 2026)

Policy & Continental Response

2026 marks a historic shift in African WASH policy:

- **AU Theme of the Year 2026:** “Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems” (African Union Commission 2026)
- **Africa Water Vision 2063:** Water as a human right and driver of economic growth, integrated within the WEFE (Water–Energy–Food) nexus.
- **Gender-Transformative Investments (WACDEP-G):** Women are now mandated as decision-makers in water infrastructure projects across 18 pilot countries.
- **Menstrual Equity Laws:** Countries like Kenya and South Africa remove VAT on menstrual products and integrate MHM into national education budgets.



The 100 African Women Leading Africa's WASH Future

Credit: ©Oluomo Worldwide

This photo shows Yoruba women from across Nigeria who gather at their cultural festivals. At Yoruba water festivals, women embody both cultural and ecological stewardship. They are the symbolic bridge between feminine fertility and the life-giving flow of rivers, connecting communities to revered deities like Osun and Yemoja. They uphold taboos that protect water and biodiversity. Conservation is deeply embedded in these traditions: the festival takes place at the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, a UNESCO World Heritage site, where restrictions on fishing, hunting, and tree-felling serve as indigenous tools for ecological protection. Women are everyday guardians of water, teaching sustainable practices and monitoring quality, ensuring both cultural heritage and the ecosystem endure for future generations.



“Across Africa, women represent less than a quarter of leadership roles in the water and sanitation sector.

The women featured on the following pages represent a powerful cross-section of leadership shaping Africa’s water future. From ministers and policymakers to engineers, researchers, entrepreneurs, storytellers, and grassroots champions, they are advancing solutions that

strengthen water, sanitation, and hygiene systems across the continent. Selected from all 54 African countries, this List of 100 African Women Leading Africa’s Water & Sanitation Future reflects the diversity, expertise, and determination driving Africa’s WASH sector forward.



Credit: afdb.africa-newsroom.com





Hon. Martha Karua | Kenya
Former Minister, Water Resources Management and Development
Legacy Honoree





Martha Karua's visionary leadership reshaped Kenya's water sector, leaving a transformative legacy that continues to guide governance and access to water today. As Minister for Water Resources Management and Development, she championed reforms that put communities, transparency, and accountability at the centre of service delivery, ensuring water access became a regulated public right rather than a political favour. She spearheaded the 1999 National Water Policy (Sessional Paper No.1, 1999), establishing a framework for sustainable water resource management, decentralisation, stakeholder participation, and equitable access, laying the foundation for modern, inclusive water governance in Kenya and advancing the principle that access to safe water is a fundamental human right.

Building on this, Karua led the historic Water Act of 2002, which operationalised the 1999 policy by separating policy formulation from service delivery, decentralising water services to regional boards and community entities, and creating autonomous institutions such as the Water Services Regulatory Authority, Water Services Trust Fund, and regional Water Service Boards.

These reforms embedded accountability, gender sensitivity, and community ownership into Kenya's water sector. Water access became a regulated public right rather than a political favour.

She also championed affirmative action initiatives, aligning with constitutional and policy frameworks to ensure women, youth, and marginalised groups had meaningful participation in water governance. These reforms embedded gender sensitivity, accountability, and community ownership into the sector, creating structures that continue to benefit millions and reinforcing governance systems that support the progressive realisation of the human right to water.

Policy, Legislation, and inclusive leadership can transform public services like water

Martha Karua's reforms set enduring benchmarks for regional water governance, demonstrating how policy, legislation, and inclusive leadership can transform public services. Her leadership exemplifies courage, vision, and systemic change, bridging the 1999 water policy, the 2002 Water Act, and affirmative action mandates into a cohesive legacy that strengthened Kenya's commitment to equitable access to water as a public good and a recognised human right. By empowering communities and ensuring equitable access, she has left an indelible mark on Kenya's WASH sector, making her a true legacy figure in African water governance.





Credit: Department of Water and Sanitation South Africa

Government and Public Sector Leaders

GOVERNMENTS ARE THE CUSTODIANS OF THE HUMAN RIGHT TO WATER AND SANITATION, ENSURING THAT EVERY COMMUNITY HAS SAFE, RELIABLE, AND EQUITABLE ACCESS.

#FightingCorruptionZA Photograph of Hon. Pemmy Majodina, Minister of Water and Sanitation, South Africa leading a signing of pledge following the launch of Water Sector Anti-Corruption Forum. These women listed in this category are leading and transforming ministries, agencies, and public institutions, embedding accountability, climate resilience, and equity into water systems, ensuring policies translate into measurable impact for communities across Africa. By championing structural reforms, advocating gender-responsive budgeting, and shaping decision-making at every level, their leadership turns the human right to water into a reality, delivering safe, reliable, and life-changing services for millions





H.E. Abida Sidik Mia | Malawi
Minister of Water and Sanitation | Malawi

Abida Sidik Mia, Former Minister of Water and Sanitation for Malawi, has emerged as one of the country's most influential leaders in water governance, elevating the sector to cabinet priority and embedding climate resilience into national policy. Through her leadership, water is repositioned not simply as a service, but as a cornerstone of national development and climate adaptation. Her flagship Green Economy and Climate Resilience Roadmap established water as a strategic pillar of Malawi's national adaptation agenda, recognising sustainable water systems as fundamental to human wellbeing and economic stability. Under her stewardship, the Ministry secured multimillion-dollar donor commitments, enabling the rehabilitation of over 1,000 rural boreholes and restoring safe, reliable water access for hundreds of thousands of

households. Mia's reforms are systemic in both vision and execution. She transitioned from fragmented NGO-led interventions to stronger sovereign financing for water infrastructure, embedding operation and maintenance budgets within district development plans. Community maintenance committees were institutionalised and aligned with fiscal allocations, creating a governance framework in which resilience is measurable, accountable, and nationally owned. Beyond her ministerial portfolio, Mia serves as Deputy President of the Malawi Congress Party, advocating sustainable African financing models and personally supporting rural borehole initiatives, reflecting leadership grounded in service, accountability, and lasting impact.



H.E. Dr. Amal Mint Maouloud | Mauritania
Minister of Water and Sanitation

Amal brings technical depth to Mauritania's water policy, leveraging her PhD in Fluid Mechanics to modernize Nouakchott's fragile hydraulic infrastructure. She spearheaded the expansion of the Beni Nadji treatment plant, securing Chinese technical partnerships that boosted capacity and reliability for the capital's growing population. Her reforms have focused on embedding operator training and maintenance protocols, ensuring that infrastructure investments translate into sustained service delivery rather than shortterm fixes. Her leadership extends into the diplomatic arena. Maouloud is steering Mauritania's 2026 accession to the UN Water Convention, a move that will anchor the country within global water governance

frameworks. This accession signals Mauritania's intent to align with international norms on transboundary water management and climate resilience, positioning the nation as a credible partner in regional negotiations. By combining engineering expertise with diplomatic strategy, Maouloud has created a dual legacy: technical modernization at home and global credibility abroad. Her work demonstrates how African ministers can leverage scientific excellence to secure international partnerships, while simultaneously embedding resilience into national systems. This blend of technical rigor and diplomatic foresight makes her one of the continent's most strategic water leaders.



H.E. Amina NurHussein | Eritrea
Minister of Health

Amina has demonstrated outstanding leadership in advancing public health and sanitation in Eritrea through her role as Minister of Health. Under her stewardship, the country has strengthened national programs promoting environmental sanitation, hygiene education, and disease prevention, recognizing the essential role that safe water, sanitation, and hygiene play in improving health outcomes. She has supported community-based sanitation initiatives and collaborated with international partners to expand hygiene awareness and strengthen WASH practices within health facilities and communities. Her commitment to integrating WASH into national health strategies has contributed to improved public health resilience and the prevention of water-borne diseases. Through her sustained leadership, Minister Nurhussein continues to champion policies that prioritize community well-being, preventive health, and equitable access to essential sanitation and hygiene services.



H.E. Anne Désirée Ouloto | Côte d'Ivoire
Minister of Civil Service and Administration Modernization

Anne Désirée Ouloto has earned her nickname- 'Mama Bulldozer' by spearheading one of West Africa's most ambitious urban resilience programs: a multi billion dollar drainage and solid-waste overhaul in Abidjan. The initiative targeted the city's chronic vulnerability to climate-induced flooding, that displaced thousands each year disrupting economic activity. By integrating drainage expansion with waste-management reforms, Ouloto significantly reduced blockages and strengthened flood-mitigation capacity across the metropolitan area. For this transformative impact and her regional leadership as President of the Cavally Regional Council, she received the 2023 National Prize of Excellence for Best Local Elected Official and holds the rank of Commander in the National Order of Côte d'Ivoire.



“True urban resilience is built when engineering solutions, sustainable financing, and community responsibility work as one system,” Anne advises.

Ouloto's leadership extended beyond engineering. She mobilized financing from partners such as the African Development Bank and bilateral donors, while ensuring municipal budgets included operations and maintenance funding to sustain the infrastructure. She also championed community awareness campaigns linking responsible waste disposal to drainage performance, aligning behavioral change with technical investments. Strategically, her program has become a benchmark for megacity resilience. By pairing large-scale infrastructure with governance reforms, Ouloto demonstrated that African cities can deliver complex climate-adaptation solutions. Today, her model is referenced in international resilience case studies, reinforcing Côte d'Ivoire's leadership in climate adaptation and sustainable urban transformation.





Bogadi Theresa | Botswana
Director of Water Affairs

As the first Motswana woman to reach the executive cadre in Botswana's technical water administration, Mathangwane broke barriers in a traditionally male-dominated sector. Reflecting on the challenge, she often recalls the mantra that guided her journey: "Throw me to the wolves and I'll come back leading the pack."

As Director of Water Affairs, Mathangwane has played a pivotal role in shaping Botswana's water security strategy in a semi-arid nation where sustainable management of scarce resources is critical to economic stability and community wellbeing. A leading practitioner of Integrated Water Resources Management, she has championed policies that combine conservation, demand management, and equitable access. Her work ensures that water governance extends beyond infrastructure to address the social and economic realities of communities, particularly women and girls who bear the greatest burden of water scarcity. Her leadership has gained regional and international recognition, including acknowledgment by the Global Water Partnership for advancing gender-responsive water policy. Through initiatives such as the Women in Water Diplomacy Network, she also contributes to transboundary cooperation and conflict prevention across Southern Africa. Today, Mathangwane stands as a transformative voice in Africa's water sector- demonstrating how technical expertise, inclusive governance, and bold leadership can turn water management into a driver of resilience, equity, and sustainable development.

H.E. Dr. Nilda Borges da Mata | São Tomé and Príncipe
Minister of Environment and Sustainable Tourism

"Our 'Zero Waste' vision is not only about sanitation but also protecting our communities and our oceans. By professionalizing waste management and linking land-based sanitation to the Blue Economy, we safeguard the ecosystems sustaining our tourism, fisheries, and national prosperity," Dr. Nilda



Nilda has emerged as a key architect of São Tomé and Príncipe's modern sanitation and environmental resilience strategy. Since assuming office, she has reframed sanitation from a narrow public works concern into a matter of national health, environmental protection, and economic security for the tourism-dependent island state. Da Mata has successfully mobilized

international support from partners such as the Global Environment Facility and the United Nations to safeguard river basins and coastal waters from pollution. At the community level, she champions Community-Led Total Sanitation, enabling rural districts to eliminate open defecation through locally driven hygiene initiatives. She has also advanced gender-responsive environmental policy and mandatory sanitation standards in schools, ensuring safe facilities for girls and boys. Through this integrated approach, da Mata is positioning São Tomé and Príncipe as a model for climate-resilient sanitation among small island developing states.





Fatima Maada | Sierra Leone

First lady

Accessible sanitation and menstrual hygiene is not just infrastructure but the foundation for education, gender equality, and national progress. Fatima has transformed sanitation in Sierra Leone from a technical service into a national engine for social change. As an AMCOW African Champion of Sanitation and Hygiene, she has mobilized policy, resources, and grassroots action to ensure women and children gain access to dignified facilities. Her focus on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) has kept thousands of schoolgirls in classrooms, dismantled stigma, and linked hygiene to educational continuity. Initiatives like “Hands Off Our Girls” combine sanitary infrastructure, hygiene kits, and behaviour-change campaigns, directly improving public health, safety, and gender equity. By reframing WASH as a matter of human dignity and national security, Fatima Maada Bio has turned sanitation into a measurable driver of education, empowerment, and social transformation across Sierra Leone.



Hadjira Oumouri | Comoros

Former Member of the National Assembly & Founder of Femmes en Mouvement

Hadjira Oumouri stands as a transformative force in the Comorian archipelago, bridging the critical gap between high-level legislative policy and grassroots community health. As one of the first women elected to the National Assembly, she shattered entrenched gender barriers to position the domestic needs of women at the center of the national agenda. Through her influential association, Femmes en Mouvement, Oumouri has empowered Comorian women to transition from passive water users to active managers of community resources. She recognized early in her career that sustainable sanitation outcomes are impossible without the structural inclusion of women in local governance. By advocating for laws that protect social health and gender equality, she created the necessary legal and social framework for hygiene behaviour change to take root in both rural and urban households. Her work proves that in a small island developing state, the most effective WASH interventions are those that leverage the power of female leadership to drive institutional and domestic reform.



H.E. Ines Nefer | Congo Brazzaville

Minister for Women's Promotion and Integration in Development

Ines Nefer Ingani is a transformative leader advancing the Water-Gender Nexus in Central Africa. As Minister for Women’s Promotion and Integration in Development, she ensures that women are not just water users but primary managers of the Republic of Congo’s ecological and water resources. By hosting the AWLN Intergenerational Retreat and driving gender-inclusive policies, Ingani strengthens women’s leadership in WASH and climate sectors. Her work embeds gender equity into national strategy, proving that inclusive governance is critical for sustainable water security and ecosystem resilience across the Congo Basin.



**H.E. María Consuelo Nguema Oyana | Equatorial Guinea
Minister for Social Affairs and Gender Equality**

María has been a strong advocate for social development and community well-being in Equatorial Guinea through her leadership as Minister for Social Affairs and Gender Equality. Her work focuses on improving the quality of life for vulnerable populations, particularly women and children, by promoting access to essential services including sanitation, hygiene education, and community health awareness. She has supported initiatives that integrate gender equality with improved sanitation and hygiene practices, recognizing that safe and dignified WASH services are fundamental to social inclusion and human development. Through collaboration with national and international partners, she has contributed to strengthening programs that promote healthier communities and improved living conditions. Her leadership reflects a commitment to empowering communities while advancing sustainable development and public health priorities.



Tracy Molefi | Botswana

**Senior Coordinator, International Waters Unit, Ministry of
Lands and Water Affairs**

Tracy Molefi is a formidable technical leader in Botswana's Ministry of Lands and Water Affairs, serving as senior coordinator for the International Waters Unit. A career expert rather than a politician, she represents Botswana in complex transboundary negotiations, including the Okavango (OKACOM) and Orange-Senqu (ORASECOM) river basins. Her mastery of hydro-diplomacy and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) ensures that Botswana secures its fair share of water while building rural and urban system resilience to climate shocks. Recognized as a "Technical Pillar" across SADC, Molefi bridges engineering, policy, and international law, positioning Botswana as a model for expert-led transboundary cooperation.



Justice Nthomeng Majara | Lesotho

**Deputy Prime Minister and Chairperson, National SDG
Oversight Committee**

Justice Nthomeng Majara is a formidable jurist and stateswoman who has redefined executive leadership in African WASH. As the first female Chief Justice of Lesotho and now Deputy Prime Minister, she has leveraged her legal and political authority to transform sanitation from policy papers into everyday impact. Her philosophy that "environmental dignity" is a fundamental human right inspired the "Hloekisa Lesotho" (Clean Lesotho) campaign, mobilizing thousands in community cleaning and waste management initiatives and reshaping national attitudes toward hygiene responsibility. As Chair of the National SDG Oversight Committee, Majara ensures SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) is a prioritized budget item, protecting highland water sources that serve as Southern Africa's "water tower." Her leadership bridges judiciary, executive, and grassroots action, demonstrating that sustainable WASH success requires both legal rigor and community engagement.



Woman Work

Written By, Maya Angelou

*I've got the children to tend
The clothes to mend
The floor to mop
The food to shop
Then the chicken to fry
The baby to dry
I got company to feed
The garden to weed
I've got shirts to press
The tots to dress
The can to be cut
I gotta clean up this hut
Then see about the sick
And the cotton to pick.
Shine on me, sunshine
Rain on me, rain
Fall softly, dewdrops
And cool my brow again.
Storm, blow me from here
With your fiercest wind
Let me float across the sky
'Til I can rest again.
Fall gently, snowflakes
Cover me with white
Cold icy kisses and
Let me rest tonight.
Sun, rain, curving sky
Mountain, oceans, leaf and stone
Star shine, moon glow
You're all that I can call my own.*



Voices from African Women In WASH Allies



Africa's water future depends on moving from commitment to delivery. Ensuring sustainable water and sanitation systems, while empowering women and communities is central to achieving the vision of Agenda 2063.

- H.E. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC)

Africa's water future is female. Women are driving innovation, community engagement, and sustainability in ways that transform policies and ensure water security for generations.

-H.E. Dr. Cheikh Tidiane Dièye, Minister for Hydraulics and Sanitation, Senegal; President, African Ministers' Council on Water

Water management and climate resilience go hand in hand. Women's leadership across communities, utilities, and policy spaces is essential for creating adaptive, sustainable, and equitable water systems.

- Professor Hani Sewilam, Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, Egypt

Women are catalysts for water resilience. Where they lead, governance improves, systems perform better, and communities thrive.

-H.E. Sahle-Work Zewde, Former President of Ethiopia

Water is becoming a crucial political issue globally, also water security and gender equality are inseparable, so we must start addressing this now and prepare for the future.

- H.E. Samia Suluhu Hassan, President of Tanzania





Credit: CFI.com

Systems Strengthening Leaders

The photo shows part of Tanzania water bond team who made history in 2024 when the Tanga Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Authority issued East Africa’s first-ever sub-national water infrastructure green bond- raising approximately USD 19.7 million to expand sustainable water services and protect water sources in the Tanga region. Tanzanian amongst other African women strengthen foundations making sustainable WASH services possible. Working across policy, regulation, financing, and institutional reform, they shape the rules, relationships, and resources that enable WASH systems to function effectively and equitably. Their leadership focuses not only on infrastructure, but on building resilient sector institutions, strengthening accountability, and ensuring governments, utilities, communities, and partners work together within coherent and sustainable frameworks. By improving governance structures, financing mechanisms, regulatory oversight, and service delivery models, they transform fragmented interventions into durable national systems. These leaders recognise that lasting progress depends on strong institutions, capable actors, sustainable financing, and reliable data for decision-making. Their work ensures WASH services are embedded within systems delivering safe, reliable, and inclusive access for generations. Through policy reform, regulatory leadership, and sector-wide coordination, they are shaping the institutional architecture that allows Africa’s WASH systems to thrive at scale.





Dr. Akissa Bahri | Tunisia

Professor, National Agricultural Institute of Tunisia (INAT)

Akissa Bahri has dedicated her career to demonstrating how targeted investments in water, sanitation, and hygiene can create lasting impact across Africa. She has worked with governments, utilities, and regional organisations to strengthen water governance, improve service delivery, and mobilise resources that support sustainable development. Her leadership highlights the importance of connecting water systems with broader economic

Strategic WASH financing is a tool to link water, energy, and food security in ways that transform communities and economies

and social goals, including energy access and food security, ensuring that interventions benefit communities comprehensively. Through her advisory roles and policy work, Bahri has championed approaches that prioritise resilience, inclusivity, and accountability. She advocates for financing models that enable countries to move from fragmented projects to durable, nationally owned water solutions. By embedding women's leadership, gender equity, and community participation into planning and investment, she ensures that water systems do not only provide essential services but also contribute to economic empowerment and social transformation. Akissa Bahri exemplifies how strategic vision, technical expertise, and cross-sector collaboration can turn water resources into engines of sustainable development for Africa.



Asma El Kasmi | Morocco

Chair of Water, Women and Decision Power, UNESCO

Asma has redefined water governance by embedding gender equity into decision-making frameworks. As UNESCO Chair of *Water, Women and Decision Power*, she pioneered the world's first comprehensive methodology for gender disaggregated water data, enabling policymakers to measure and act on women's representation in water governance. This methodology has been adopted by ministries and universities across North Africa, creating a new evidence base for policy reform. Her leadership extends beyond academia. El Kasmi convened a regional network of policymakers, researchers, and civil society leaders, ensuring that gender metrics are not confined to research but embedded in governance. She trained officials in the use of gender indicators, ensuring that

is tracked in water boards, committees, and decision-making bodies. By institutionalizing these practices, she has transformed gender equity from symbolic rhetoric into measurable policy outcomes. Strategically, El Kasmi's work positions Morocco as a continental leader in gender responsive governance. By linking data to decision power, she has created a replicable model for other African states. Her methodology is now cited in UN reports on gender and water, underscoring her role as a global thought leader. In a sector often dominated by infrastructure metrics, El Kasmi demonstrates that governance innovation can be just as transformative.





Dr. Batsirai Majuru | Zimbabwe
Technical Officer, World Health Organisation (WHO)

Batsi is a Public health and water policy expert whose work strengthens global water governance through a systems and equity lens. As Technical Officer in WHO's Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Health Unit, she leads efforts to develop and implement drinking-water and sanitation regulations that protect public health while promoting equitable access.

Dr. Majuru emphasises that,
“Robust regulatory systems
are the foundation for safe,
inclusive, and sustainable
water services.”

Through her coordination of WHO's International Network of Drinking-water and Sanitation Regulators (RegNet), she empowers countries across Africa and beyond to translate evidence into enforceable standards, ensuring that rural and underserved communities' benefit. Her career bridges research, policy, and advocacy, integrating health, gender, and environmental considerations into WASH frameworks. With a PhD in Public Health and Water Policy from the University of East Anglia, she mentors emerging African WASH leaders, demonstrating how technical expertise and strategic governance can drive measurable improvements in water access and public health outcomes.



Dr. Pedi Chiemena Obani | Nigeria

Associate Professor of Law, University of Bradford, UK)

Dr. Pedi Chiemena Obani is a Nigerian legal scholar and global expert in water governance, climate justice, and the human rights to water and sanitation. As Associate Professor of Law at the University of Bradford and Chair of the Expert Committee of Human Right 2 Water, she advances legal frameworks and policy dialogue to operationalize the human right to water worldwide. Leading a £1.28 million UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship, she researches gender-inclusive climate and water governance, linking law, policy, and environmental justice. Her scholarship, advocacy, and mentorship drive equitable, rights-based solutions for water and climate challenges across Africa and globally.

“If climate change is leading to droughts or water scarcity, it automatically means less water for a woman to drink and for hygiene, and for those who have caring responsibilities, it means less water overall.”



Fatimetou Mint Abdel Malick | Mauritania
President of Nouakchott Regional Council

Fatimetou Mint Abdel Malick is the first woman President of Nouakchott Regional Council, pioneering gender-responsive urban WASH and disaster risk reduction. She has implemented large-scale handwashing and sanitation infrastructure, strengthening public health and community resilience. By integrating WASH into urban governance, she ensures equitable access to safe water while mobilizing partnerships with civil society and international organizations. Abdel Malick's leadership demonstrates that women can transform cities into inclusive, resilient spaces. She emphasizes that "Urban water and sanitation are not just services—they are lifelines for public health, dignity, and safety." Her vision has positioned Nouakchott and Mauritania as models for urban WASH innovation, resilience, and inclusive governance.



Eng. Farai Tunhuma | Zimbabwe
Chief of WASH, UNICEF Afghanistan

Farai Tunhuma is a visionary civil and water engineer leading UNICEF's WASH programmes in Afghanistan. With over 20 years of international experience, she combines technical engineering precision with strategic humanitarian leadership, designing climate-resilient water and sanitation systems that withstand extreme environmental shocks. She has successfully managed large-scale infrastructure projects delivering safe water to millions, linking engineering, governance, and policy to achieve SDG 6. Her work integrates renewable energy, gender-responsive approaches, and resilience planning, ensuring vulnerable communities benefit equitably from sustainable WASH services. A recognized thought leader in humanitarian WASH, Tunhuma bridges technical excellence with systems-level strategy, demonstrating how engineering innovation, policy alignment, and operational coordination can transform water access and sanitation outcomes in crisis-affected regions.



“My lived experience is that of working directly with women experiencing challenges accessing water and sanitation services. I am committed to sharing their challenges with the world and working towards finding scalable solutions to make their daily lives easier.”





Dr. Fatima Denton | Burkina Faso
Director, United Nations University Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (UNU-INRA)

Dr. Fatima Denton is a climate scientist and policy leader advancing Africa's resilience to climate change. As Director of UNU-INRA, she leads research and policy initiatives at the intersection of water, energy, and food systems, strengthening sustainable resource management and climate adaptation strategies. She has contributed as an author to IPCC reports, shaping global climate science and policy. Her work emphasizes that **"Climate adaptation requires integrated approaches linking natural resources, governance, and local communities."** Formerly with the UN Economic Commission for Africa, Denton has championed continental climate policy initiatives, advancing evidence-based frameworks that guide African nations toward climate-resilient development and equitable access to essential natural resources.



Florence Grace Adongo | Uganda
Former Executive Director, Nile Basin Initiative (NBI)

Florence is a trailblazer in East African water governance, serving as the first woman Director of Water Resources Management in Uganda and later leading the Nile Basin Initiative. She developed the regulatory architecture and IWRM frameworks that balance climate-resilient water allocation across 10+ riparian states, ensuring cooperation over conflict. Adongo emphasizes that **"Water equity is inseparable from governance and regional diplomacy."** She pioneered policies reducing rural water access distances from 1.5 km to 500 meters, directly improving lives of millions of women and girls. Recognized with the 2024 IHE Delft Alumnus Award, her career demonstrates the power of combining technical mastery, social equity, and transboundary governance for sustainable water security.



Francisca Pereira | Guinea-Bissau
Former Minister for Women's Affairs, Guinea-Bissau

Francisca Pereira was a pioneering political leader advancing women's rights, community development, and access to safe water and sanitation in Guinea-Bissau. As Minister for Women's Affairs, she championed initiatives integrating hygiene, sanitation, and public health services into national development, demonstrating that access to WASH is critical for family health and community resilience. Pereira emphasizes that **"Empowering women begins with ensuring safe water, sanitation, and hygiene for every household."** Through policymaking, advocacy, and collaboration with civil society, she strengthened community well-being and gender equity. Her decades of leadership reflect a sustained commitment to inclusive governance, raising the profile of WASH and women's empowerment as essential pillars of national and local development.



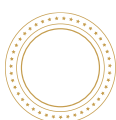


Where Are the Women? Mapping Leadership in Africa's Water Ministries

This map of Africa illustrates the distribution of women in leadership roles within national ministries responsible for water and sanitation. Countries shaded in pink indicate those where women hold prominent leadership positions, while those in blue represent nations with limited or no female representation in these roles. The visualisation highlights regional disparities: Southern Africa and parts of West Africa show relatively stronger female leadership footprints, while many other regions remain underrepresented. These patterns underscore both the progress made and the persistent gender gaps across Africa's water governance landscape. The water sector; spanning national ministries, public and private utilities, regulatory authorities, academic institutions, and policy-making bodies- has historically been male dominated, reflecting trends common in technical and infrastructure-related fields. Globally, women make up approximately 37% of the water workforce but hold only 23% of managerial

positions, a lower proportion than in comparable sectors such as energy. A more recent assessment of 173 water-sector organizations across the Global South found that women occupy only 26% of leadership roles. Multiple structural and social factors contribute to this disparity, including entrenched gender norms, unequal access to technical education, and institutional barriers within organizations. Scholars often describe this phenomenon as a "leadership ceiling," where women with the necessary qualifications still encounter obstacles to advancement, such as gender bias, limited professional networks, and weak mentorship systems. Additionally, subtle but persistent constraints- including inflexible workplace policies and non-inclusive recruitment and promotion practice- continue to hinder women's progression into senior leadership positions.

Source: Adapted from Oluwasanya, G., et al. (2025), United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH).



Malak Altaeb | Libya

Non-Resident Scholar, Middle East Institute, Washington DC

Malak Altaeb is a Libyan water-food-energy nexus policy expert and researcher whose work bridges high-level climate policy and the lived realities of water scarcity in Libya and the broader MENA region. Based in Paris, she holds a Master's in Environmental Policy from Sciences Po University and a Chemical Engineering degree from Tripoli University. Altaeb's research focuses on water politics, nexus analysis, and environmental security, with contributions to Arab Reform Initiative, ISPI, The Policy Corner, and Minority Rights Group International reports on water scarcity. She has published influential analysis on Libya's water governance and the Great Man-Made River, demonstrating **"that Water is Politics and effective water policy must link technical insight with inclusive governance and climate resilience."** Her leadership in international think tanks makes her one of Libya's most visible young voices on water policy.



Itireleng Kaunda | Botswana

Governance & Risk Champion, Water Utilities Corporation (WUC)

Itireleng Kaunda is a distinguished leader in Botswana's water sector, driving governance, risk management, and organizational accountability at the Water Utilities Corporation. With CIA certification, an MBA, and a Strategic Management Development Programme credential, she ensures that operations, finance, and service delivery meet rigorous standards. Kaunda emphasizes that **"Strong governance is the backbone of sustainable water services and community trust."** Her work strengthens institutional integrity, operational performance, and equitable access to water, while exemplifying the role of women in senior utility leadership. Through strategic planning, audit oversight, and inclusive management, Kaunda positions Botswana as a model for resilient, accountable, and community-focused water service provision.



Katrina Lago Lyetu Kagadhinwa | Namibia

Chief Information Officer (CIO), NamWater Ltd

Katrina Kagadhinwa is the Chief Information Officer at NamWater Ltd, leading the utility's digital transformation, IT governance, and systems strategy. With a Master's in Information Systems Management and 18 years of experience, she connects technology with core water operations to improve smart water management, data-driven decision-making, and service resilience. Kagadhinwa emphasizes that **"Digital infrastructure is central to modern, reliable, and inclusive water services."** Her leadership integrates innovation, operational efficiency, and technology-enabled resilience, ensuring that NamWater adapts to emerging challenges and delivers sustainable WASH services across Namibia. She exemplifies how ICT can transform utility performance, strengthen infrastructure, and enhance equitable access to water in the 21st century.



H.E. Laila Iskandar | Egypt

Former Minister of State for Urban Renewal and Informal Settlements

“Informal urban settlements, sanitation, waste management and water services are not only about public health, they are central to climate resilience, community dignity and the right of cities’ most vulnerable residents to live safely.”- Laila Iskandar



Laila Iskandar is a nationally recognised leader in urban development and environmental governance who played a pivotal role in integrating water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) into Egypt’s urban renewal agenda. As Minister of State for Urban Renewal and Informal Settlements, she exercised national leadership to ensure sanitation, water access and basic services were embedded within programmes upgrading informal and unsafe settlements affecting millions of urban residents. Under her leadership, sanitation and water services were integrated into state-led upgrading initiatives targeting unplanned urban areas, ensuring that essential WASH infrastructure was delivered alongside housing, roads and public services. This approach improved public health and strengthened the resilience of vulnerable communities facing climate pressures such as flooding, heat and water contamination in dense informal settlements. Iskandar also championed participatory planning processes that enabled women and community representatives to influence the design and placement of sanitation facilities and water connections. By linking WASH to livelihoods, housing security and environmental sustainability, she reframed sanitation as a governance, dignity and climate resilience issue within national urban policy.

Martine Kessy Ekomo-Soignet | Central African Republic

Founder, URU | Director, Peace & Development Watch RCA

Martine Kessy Ekomo-Soignet is a formidable force in the Central African Republic’s journey toward stability, environmental security and youth empowerment. As Founder of URU, a youth-led NGO, and Director of Peace & Development Watch RCA, she has helped redefine how the country manages its most critical resources: its land, water and its next generation. Her leadership bridges grassroots activism and global policy with analytical precision and strategic vision. In 2016, she was appointed by the UN Secretary-General as an expert on the Global Study on Youth, Peace and Security, elevating Central African perspectives on the international stage. Recognising that water scarcity and land degradation are key drivers of conflict in CAR, Martine has been a leading advocate for integrating climate resilience into the nation’s peacebuilding architecture. A Choiseul Prize laureate and Women In Africa (WIA) finalist, she has trained thousands of young Central Africans in inclusive governance. Through this work, she has placed equitable natural resource management, especially access to water and fertile land, at the centre of the country’s recovery and long-term stability.





Mary Nelson Khamis Noah | South Sudan
Technical Expert, Women in Water Diplomacy
Network in the Nile

Mary is a leading technical expert advancing South Sudan's role in transboundary water governance. As a member of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in the Nile, she bridges scientific water management and regional diplomacy, ensuring evidence-based contributions to the stewardship of shared Nile Basin resources. She serves as Overall Focal Point for UN-Water and the African Ministers' Council on Water monitoring frameworks in South Sudan, tracking national progress toward global water and sanitation goals and aligning strategies with continental initiatives such as AfricaSan. As a respected researcher, Mary studies climate change impacts on the Blue Nile Sub-Basin, particularly for hydropower and water resource management. Through research, policy engagement and regional representation, she champions cooperation, environmental stewardship and inclusive water diplomacy across the Nile Basin.



H.E. Aïcha Mohamed Robleh | Djibouti
Minister, Women and Family

Her leadership in the social sector has had a transformative effect on water access in Djibouti. As Minister of Social Affairs and Solidarity (2019–2021) and Secretary of State for Social Affairs (2016–2019), she oversaw the Djibouti Social Development Agency (ADDS), the government body responsible for implementing critical infrastructure and community development projects in vulnerable and rural areas.

Under her guidance, ADDS launched international tenders and supervised the construction of rural water supply systems, improving access to clean water in remote regions such as Ali-Sabieh and Tadjourah. She coordinated with regional bodies, including IGAD

and international partners to implement drought mitigation programs, providing emergency water access and building resilient infrastructure to combat chronic water scarcity. Aden also integrated water access into broader social protection strategies aligned with the national "Djibouti 2035" vision, recognizing water as a fundamental right and essential to reducing poverty and improving public health outcomes. In her current role as Minister of Women and Family, she continues to champion water access as a critical gender and development issue, highlighting the disproportionate impact of water scarcity on women and girls and advocating for sustainable, inclusive solutions that benefit all communities. Through her multi-sectoral approach, H.E. Mouna Osman Aden exemplifies how social leadership can drive meaningful progress in water access and resilience.





Eng. Mwajuma Waziri | Tanzania
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Water
Under her oversight,
community-based water projects
now manage an investment portfolio
of over US\$500 million. She has also
championed regional collaboration,
overseeing the delivery of 8 new
hydrological monitoring stations to
strengthen data-driven water
resource management across critical
river basins.



Mwajuma Waziri is a central figure in Tanzania's drive to expand access to safe water and sanitation. As Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Water, she provides strategic leadership to policy, planning and implementation of national water services; an effort that recently saw rural water coverage reach 85.2%, surpassing the government's target ahead of schedule. Her approach is both strategic and practical. In meetings with community water organisations, Mwajuma has directly challenged service providers to end arbitrary billing and ensure basic operational standards, insisting that "citizens have a right to quality service" and urging teams to prioritise repairs to leaks and malfunctioning pumps that, in some areas, had left villagers without water for months." Her hands-on leadership, combining technical rigor and accountability, has translated national policy into measurable results for millions of Tanzanians, illustrating why she is a standout nominee in the WASH sector.





Nompumelelo Ntshalintshali-Motsa | Eswatini

Former Africa Coordinator, Sanitation and Water for All (SWA)

Nompumelelo is a water governance leader whose work has strengthened sanitation and water policy coordination across Africa. With a background in environmental engineering and water technology, she has advanced from technical monitoring to regional diplomacy, shaping how governments prioritise water security and sanitation. As Africa Regional Coordinator for Sanitation and Water for All, she translated global commitments into national action, keeping water and sanitation central to economic development and public health. Nationally, she chaired the Eswatini National WASH Forum, transforming it into a coordinated platform for ministries, partners, and civil society, aligning planning with SDG 6 and promoting climate-resilient WASH systems. Through the Women in Water Diplomacy Network, she champions gender-inclusive water governance and women's leadership in transboundary resource management



Prudence Ngwenya | Eswatini

Director, Women, Gender and Youth Directorate, African Union Commission

Prudence Ngwenya is a senior strategist shaping continental policy on gender equality and inclusive development. As Director of the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate at the African Union Commission, she translates the ambitions of Agenda 2063 into actionable policies that empower women and young people across Africa. A strong advocate for gender-responsive infrastructure, Ngwenya has elevated water, sanitation and hygiene within continental policy debates. She champions gender-disaggregated data to show how inadequate WASH services disproportionately affect women's health, economic opportunities, and social participation. Through ministerial forums and specialized technical committees, she promotes investment in care infrastructure, including safe water access and dignified sanitation, positioning WASH as a foundation for gender equality, economic productivity, and inclusive development across Africa.



Dr. Rose Christine Kaggwa | Uganda |

Senior Director, Business and Scientific Services | National Water and Sewerage Corporation

Dr. Rose is a leading force in Africa's water sector, widely recognised for transforming utility performance, advancing water quality systems, and shaping global water leadership. With over three decades of experience, she has been central to the rise of the National Water and Sewerage Corporation as one of Africa's most respected and high-performing utilities. A chemist with advanced expertise in environmental and water quality management, she has driven the institutionalisation of water safety planning and led the expansion of NWSC's international consultancy footprint across Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Beyond her executive role, she holds influential leadership positions within the International Water Association and global water partnerships, contributing to policy, knowledge exchange, and sector reform. Her career reflects not just technical excellence, but enduring influence in shaping resilient, high-performing water systems across continents.



Rose Mukankomeje | Rwanda

Former Director General, Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA)

Rose Mukankomeje is one of Rwanda's most respected environmental leaders, having served as Director General of REMA. She integrated water, sanitation and hygiene into national climate policy, embedding resilience into development planning and ensuring environmental stewardship strengthens WASH outcomes. Mukankomeje advanced community-based water management, empowering rural women to take ownership of local resources and promoting equity in governance. Her leadership positioned Rwanda as a continental model for linking climate policy with water security, showing that environmental protection and WASH are inseparable. Through strategic policy innovation, she translated national environmental priorities into measurable improvements in water access, public health and climate resilience, reframing environmental management as a WASH agenda rooted in community empowerment, systemic reform, and long-term sustainable development.



Theodora Adomako Adjei | Ghana

Director of Rural Water Services, Community Water and Sanitation Agency

Mrs. Theodora Adomako Adjei is a development and management expert with more than 30 years of professional experience, including 27 years dedicated to the water, sanitation and hygiene sector in Ghana. Her work has focused on strengthening sustainable WASH services in rural and peri-urban communities through community mobilisation, gender advocacy and behaviour change programming. She has led initiatives that integrate hygiene education and social behaviour change communication into water supply programmes, ensuring that infrastructure investments translate into improved health outcomes. Her expertise spans project identification, preparation and appraisal, programme management, institutional capacity building, knowledge management and the development of information, education and communication materials. She has contributed to key sector initiatives including Community Led Total Sanitation, water safety planning, menstrual hygiene management and environmental and social safeguards. Adjei has worked with major development partners including UNICEF, the World Bank, USAID, DANIDA, KfW and the African Development Bank, and is widely recognised as a respected technical voice shaping inclusive and sustainable WASH governance in Ghana.



Water systems fail quietly when communities are not part of their design. In rural WASH, sustainability is rarely a technical failure, it is a failure to reflect how people actually live, decide, and prioritise



Wambui Gichuri | Kenya
Former, Vice President, Agriculture, Human and Social Development Complex, African Development Bank

Wambui oversaw the African Development Bank's \$4.5 billion water and sanitation portfolio, transforming fragmented projects into high-impact programmes that benefit millions of urban residents. She led the \$500 million African Urban Sanitation Investment Fund and drives blended finance solutions that unlock public and private investment for inclusive citywide sanitation. She provided strategic leadership on sector policy, programme design, partnerships, and innovation to ensure sustainability and scalability. As Chair of the IRCWASH Supervisory Board, she influenced global WASH governance, integrating finance, gender, and systems strengthening across Africa. Her visionary leadership demonstrates how strategic investment and sector guidance can deliver systemic change, positioning Kenya and the continent as exemplars in resilient, inclusive, and innovative water and sanitation solutions.



Yvonne Magawa | Zambia
Executive Secretary, Eastern and Southern Africa Water and Sanitation Regulators Association (ESAWAS)

“Effective regulation makes performance visible and accountability unavoidable. It only works when backed by credible data, consistent benchmarking, and the will to act on what that data reveals.”

Yvonne Magawa leads regulatory reforms across Eastern and Southern Africa as Executive Secretary of ESAWAS. With over 20 years of experience in water governance, she harmonises standards and promotes best practices among member states, shifting the focus from traditional sewered systems to Citywide Inclusive Sanitation. She developed multi-country benchmarking frameworks to track and improve service delivery based on peer-reviewed data. She has partnered with the African Development Bank and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to integrate non-sewered sanitation into national systems, ensuring marginalised urban populations are included in monitoring. Her hands-on leadership institutionalises accountability, data-driven governance, and inclusive utility management, setting a continental standard for equitable and sustainable water and sanitation regulation.





Credit: hassanallam.com



Eight kilometres northwest of the Pyramids of Giza, on the western bank of the Nile, Abu Rawash hosts one of the world's largest wastewater treatment plants. A model of environmental sustainability, the plant is helping Egypt achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in water security and climate resilience.

Pictured here is Pakinam Mohamed, a civil engineer supervising construction at the plant. "I am honoured to be part of this great project," she says. "Here, we protect the environment and health of Egyptians by making sure the Nile is not polluted. We preserve biodiversity and provide clean water to farmers. I am proud to contribute to a clean future for future generations."

The Abu Rawash Water Treatment Plant is Egypt's second-largest and among the world's top ten. Treating 1.6 million cubic metres of wastewater daily, it serves nine million residents in Greater Cairo and is expected to expand to two million cubic metres in coming years. Its commissioning has created nearly 150 permanent jobs and opportunities across industries, including for women engineers, technicians, and managers. The plant demonstrates how large-scale water infrastructure can empower women in technical and leadership roles while improving public health, agricultural sustainability, and environmental resilience. Projects like Abu Rawash show that women are not only part of the solution; they are leading it.

The Abu Rawash Water Treatment Plant is Egypt's second-largest and among the world's top ten. Treating 1.6 million cubic metres of wastewater daily, it serves nine million residents in Greater Cairo and is expected to expand to two million cubic metres in coming years. Its commissioning has created nearly 150 permanent jobs and opportunities across industries, including for women engineers, technicians, and managers. The plant demonstrates how large-scale water infrastructure can empower women in technical and leadership roles while improving public health, agricultural sustainability, and environmental resilience. Projects like Abu Rawash show that women are not only part of the solution; they are leading it.



Voices from African Women In WASH Allies



Empowering women in urban water and sanitation management strengthens utilities, improves service delivery, and builds inclusive governance models that benefit entire cities.

– Åsa Jonsson, Head of GWOPA, GWOPA Secretariat, UN-Habitat

Inclusive WASH governance is essential for sustainable services. Ensuring women's participation in decision-making strengthens accountability, improves service delivery, and builds systems that respond to real community needs.

– Daniela Bemfica, Strategic Programmes & Engagement Director, International Water Association

Women must shape the future of water; not only as users, but as leaders and decision-makers in water, sanitation and integrated resource management

– Meike van Ginneken, Water Envoy for the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Investing in women in WASH projects is investing in resilient communities. Across Africa, local leadership and inclusive planning ensure that infrastructure delivers real benefits, sustainably and equitably.

– Mtchera Johannes Chirwa, Director for Water Development and Sanitation, African Development Bank Group; Coordinator, African Water Facility

Achieving universal access to water and sanitation requires political will and inclusive leadership. When women are empowered across the WASH value chain, systems become more resilient, accountable, and equitable.

– Muyatwa Sitali, Acting CEO, Sanitation and Water for All





Credit: unicef.org

Innovators & Entrepreneurship Leaders

INNOVATION DELIVERS SAFE WASH, STRENGTHENS LIVELIHOODS, BUILDS CLIMATE RESILIENCE, AND EMPOWERS COMMUNITIES TO THRIVE SUSTAINABLY.

On the photo is Freweini, Founder of Mariam Saba Sanitary Products company in Mekele, Tigray Region, Ethiopia. From digitalisation to IoT, these women innovators and entrepreneurs in this category are designing, scaling, and deploying technological and business solutions that improve water, sanitation, and hygiene, while enhancing livelihoods, generating income, and strengthening climate resilience across Africa. They combine technological creativity with social entrepreneurship, turning innovative tools, smart systems, and market-based solutions into scalable, life-changing interventions that respond to community needs and environmental challenges.





Angela Mwila Kapembwa | Zambia
Management Specialist, BORDA

“Sanitation solutions must be engineered for the realities people live in,” Kapembwa says. “When technology is affordable, locally built and easy to maintain, communities can truly own it.”

Angela Mwila Kapembwa stands at the forefront of Zambia’s sanitation innovation movement, bringing engineering precision and community-centred thinking to one of Africa’s most pressing urban challenges. As a specialist with the Bremen Overseas Research & Development Association (BORDA), Kapembwa focuses on advancing Non-Sewer Sanitation and Faecal Sludge Management systems that protect public health in rapidly expanding cities such as Lusaka. Her work gained continental recognition when she received the 2023 AfricaSan Women & Youth Innovation Award during the AfricaSan Conference in Swakopmund. The honour, supported by the African Ministers’ Council on Water, celebrated her development of modular sanitation technologies designed for affordability, durability and scale. Kapembwa has pioneered modular hygiene kits that can be rapidly deployed in underserved rural and peri-urban communities. These systems reduce household costs while maintaining robust sanitation standards, offering practical solutions where large sewer infrastructure remains financially or technically out of reach. Through partnerships with local cooperatives and technician training initiatives, she is strengthening Zambia’s sanitation economy while mentoring future engineers. **“Innovation is not only about technology,” she adds. “It is about building systems that communities can sustain long after the project ends.”**

Avo Ratoarijaona | Madagascar
Senior Technical Advisor, CARE

“Women are not only users of WASH services; they bring expertise, leadership, and solutions. My greatest joy is seeing young women leading and shaping water and sanitation services in rural communities.”



Avo Ratoarijaona is a WASH systems strengthening specialist supporting African countries to deliver sustainable and inclusive water and sanitation services. As a Senior Technical Advisor – WASH Systems at CARE, she works with country teams, local governments, and private operators in Madagascar, Rwanda, Côte d’Ivoire, and Zambia to develop Public Private Partnership (PPP) models for rural water services and Market Based Sanitation (MBS) approaches adapted to local contexts. Her work focuses on moving beyond infrastructure delivery to strengthen service delivery systems, including governance, financing, and effective engagement between public and private actors. She supports private service providers to expand access to markets, finance, and collaboration with local authorities to ensure long-term sustainability. Previously, as Deputy Chief of Party of a national WASH program in Madagascar, she supported over 300,000 people to gain access to water services and more than 700,000 people to access sanitation, embedding systems thinking and private sector engagement across 250 rural communes.



Beth Koigi | Kenya
Founder and CEO, Majik Water



Credit: ROLEX/EVA DIALLO

Beth Koigi is a leading African water-technology entrepreneur, pioneering atmospheric water generation systems that produce potable water directly from air humidity. Her work addresses critical challenges such as climate stress, groundwater depletion, and service gaps in off-grid and peri-urban communities. Founded in 2017, Majik Water deploys decentralised, solar-powered systems capable of supplying schools, refugee settlements, and water-scarce areas without relying on piped infrastructure or boreholes. Koigi's innovation intersects climate resilience, last-mile access, and hybrid utility solutions, offering practical, sustainable alternatives to traditional water provision. Her contributions have earned continental recognition, including the EDF Pulse Award Africa and a shortlist placement for the Africa Prize for Engineering Innovation. Koigi has been featured on global entrepreneurship and climate innovation platforms. **"Water solutions must reach those who need them most," she says.** Her work strengthens SDG 6 outcomes while extending critical services where conventional utilities cannot.

Christa Bella Gateka | Burundi
Engineer and Technical Leader, FIADI

Christa Bella Gateka is a Burundian engineer driving inclusive water infrastructure and sanitation systems. Through her leadership at the Association of Active Women Engineers for Inclusive Development (FIADI), she has empowered women with practical skills to manage and maintain rural water systems. Gateka's programmes train women in the upkeep of solar-powered pumps, small-scale water networks, and sanitation technologies. By transforming women's roles from water collectors to technical custodians, she strengthens both gender equality and climate-resilient water access. **"Communities thrive when women lead the management of their water systems," she explains.** Her approach demonstrates that technical empowerment can reshape rural water governance, enabling sustainable, locally maintained WASH services. By combining capacity building with gender inclusion, Gateka ensures communities are equipped to operate and sustain essential water and sanitation infrastructure long-term, setting a model for inclusive development across the region.





Christelle Kwizera | Rwanda

Founder and Managing Director, Water Access Rwanda

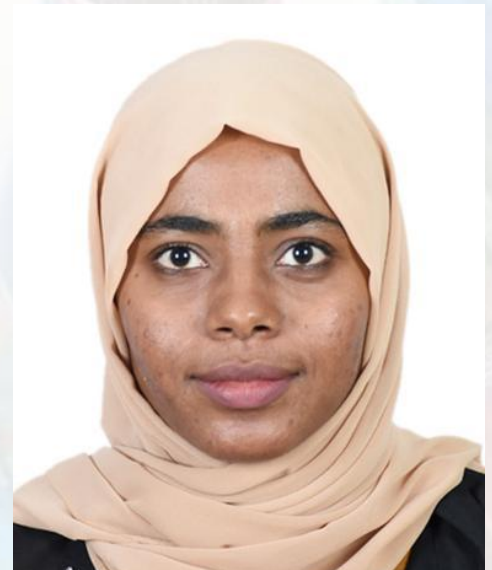
Christelle Kwizera is a transformative social entrepreneur advancing safe water access across Rwanda. As founder and managing director of Water Access Rwanda, she reaches over 70,000 people daily through a scalable model that combines infrastructure provision, local capacity building, and entrepreneurial innovation. Her teams are trained to maintain water systems, ensuring sustainability beyond initial installation. Kwizera has been globally recognised for her leadership, receiving the 2020 Global Citizen Prize: Cisco Youth Leadership Award, the 2019 Foundation Chanel Woman Entrepreneur of the Year, and the Africa Business Heroes Award from the Jack Ma Foundation. She was also included in Vital Voices' list of 100 Women Using Their Power to Empower.

“Entrepreneurship can scale water solutions sustainably,” she says. Her work positions Rwanda as a hub for innovative, women-led approaches to WASH that blend social impact with business acumen.

Fatima El Sayed | Sudan

Electronics Engineer, ICT Educator & CERT Coordinator, Community Engineering Response Team (CERT)

Fatima Elsayed is a Sudanese electronics engineer, ICT educator, and coordinator at the Community Engineering Response Team (CERT), where she applies technical innovation to improve water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in post-conflict communities. A graduate of Sudan University of Science and Technology, she has trained over 700 engineering students across eight universities to implement scalable, sustainable WASH solutions. Her initiatives include a six-month environmental awareness program emphasising solid waste management, hygiene, and community-led sanitation practices. Using the ECHO model and Peace Engineering principles, Elsayed empowers students and communities to design, build, and maintain low-cost, resilient water and sanitation systems, strengthening public health and local self-reliance. Internationally recognised as the Sudanese winner at Falling Walls Lab Khartoum (2020), her work demonstrates how STEM expertise and community engagement can generate lasting WASH impact in fragile contexts, making her a strong nominee for awards in Women in STEM, Sustainability, and Social Impact.





Freweini Mebrahtu | Ethiopia

Founder & CEO, Mariam Seba Sanitary Products Factory

Freweini Mebrahtu is an Ethiopian chemical engineer, social entrepreneur, and founder of the Mariam Seba Sanitary Products Factory, pioneering affordable and reusable menstrual hygiene solutions across Ethiopia. Growing up in rural Tigray, she experienced firsthand the barriers girls face in managing menstruation, inspiring her to develop innovative, locally produced pads that ensure dignity, hygiene, and school attendance. Through her enterprise, Mebrahtu has provided safe menstrual products to thousands of girls, trained communities on menstrual health management, and reduced stigma around menstruation— a core WASH and public health issue. Her work has earned global recognition, including being named CNN Hero of the Year (2019). By combining technical innovation, social entrepreneurship, and education advocacy, she demonstrates how WASH leadership can empower women, improve health outcomes, and advance gender equality, making her an exemplary nominee for awards in MHM, WASH, and social impact.



Eng. Godliver Businge | Uganda

Head Technology Trainer, Global Women's Water Initiative (GWVI)

Eng. Godliver Businge is a transformative force in East African WASH, training women and youth to design, build, and maintain their own water systems. As Head Technology Trainer at the Global Women's Water Initiative, she equips communities with the technical skills to construct Bio-Sand filters, decentralised rainwater harvesting systems, and climate-resilient sanitation facilities. Her leadership is grounded in a philosophy she calls **"capacity before infrastructure"**, which prioritises technical training before system installation. By shifting women's roles from water collectors to technology managers and system builders, Businge has dismantled long-standing gender barriers in rural water management. **"Every woman we train becomes a multiplier for sustainable WASH," she explains.** By emphasising local fabrication and community ownership, she ensures that the systems built remain functional and maintained for years. Her work links WASH access directly to economic empowerment, creating a new generation of community-level technicians across Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania.



Fatoumata Haidara | Mali

Machine Learning Engineer and Climate WASH Scientist

Fatoumata Haidara is advancing the digital frontier of WASH by applying artificial intelligence and machine learning to climate and water management in the Sahel. Working with SERVIR West Africa, she develops predictive models that combine satellite imagery with weather data to forecast climate hazards such as floods and locust outbreaks that threaten water resources and food security. Raised in the agricultural region of Sikasso, Haidara's early experiences with farming inspired her to explore how technology could strengthen climate resilience. Her research integrates vegetation mapping, environmental sensors, and data analytics to assess the health of water catchments across Mali. "Data allows us to anticipate crises before they escalate," she explains. By providing policymakers with accurate, real time environmental intelligence, Haidara enables proactive water management and represents a new generation of scientists shaping climate resilient WASH systems.



Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame | Ghana

Global Advocate for Disability Inclusive WASH

Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame is a leading global advocate advancing disability inclusive water and sanitation systems. Through her engagement with the United Nations and the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, she has championed standards that ensure WASH infrastructure is accessible to persons with disabilities. Fefoame's advocacy has helped transform inclusive design from a policy aspiration into a practical global standard for water and sanitation services. Her work ensures that infrastructure, facilities, and service delivery consider mobility, safety, and dignity for all users. In recognition of her impact, she received Ghana's Excellence Grand Medal. **"Inclusive design means no one is left behind," she emphasises.** Through international advocacy and policy engagement, Fefoame continues to position Ghana as a leader in disability inclusive WASH governance.



Gilda Giza Rede | Angola

Electromechanical maintenance technician, Kwanza Sul Public Water and Sanitation Company (EPASK)



Gilda Giza Rede is a pioneering 20-year-old wastewater treatment engineer contributing to the strengthening of urban sanitation systems in Angola. Working within complex treatment facilities, she oversees the biological and chemical processes that transform sewage into environmentally safe effluent. Her expertise lies in the monitoring of treatment systems, nutrient removal processes, and plant maintenance that ensure sanitation infrastructure functions effectively. This work protects public health while preventing pollution of surrounding ecosystems. By maintaining and optimising treatment facilities, she supports Angola's growing urban resilience and demonstrates how women engineers are reshaping the technical landscape of the WASH sector.

Rede also represents a new generation of women entering highly technical engineering roles in large-scale sanitation infrastructure. "Technical expertise is essential for sustainable sanitation," she notes.





Credit: Veolia.com

In the heart of one of the world's most arid regions, Windhoek, Namibia, is home to a global miracle: the Goreangab Water Reclamation Plant. While famous for being the first facility to turn municipal wastewater directly into high-quality drinking water, its impact goes far beyond the pipes. Today, this pioneer of "Direct Potable Reuse" is a vital engine for gender equality and professional empowerment in the water sector. For decades, the "feminization of water" has meant that women and girls bear the brunt of water scarcity, often spending hours trekking for water or caring for family members sickened by poor sanitation. By providing a drought-proof supply—meeting up to 35% of the city's needs; Goreangab returns that time to women. It transforms water from a daily burden into a reliable utility, allowing girls to stay in school and



women to pursue economic opportunities. Perhaps most inspiring is the shift in leadership within the plant's walls. The facility serves as a high-tech training ground for a new generation of Namibian women in STEM. From process engineers

like Justina Haihambo to laboratory technicians ensuring the safety of every drop, women are at the helm of Goreangab's sophisticated multi-barrier treatment process. They are not just participants; they are global experts, hosting delegations from the U.S. and Europe to share Namibia's "toilet-to-tap" secrets. Furthermore, by integrating reclamation with urban sanitation projects in informal settlements, the city reduces the safety risks women face when accessing communal facilities. The Goreangab model proves that solving a water crisis isn't just about chemistry and carbon filters; it's about engineering a society where water security and women's empowerment flow from the same tap.



Jamila Mayanja | Uganda
Founder and CEO, Smart Girls Uganda



Jamila Mayanja is a Ugandan social entrepreneur advancing gender responsive WASH innovation through education and menstrual health solutions. As founder of Smart Girls Uganda, she created the Solar Smart Bag, an initiative that combines reusable sanitary pads with solar powered lighting to support girls in off grid communities. The innovation addresses both menstrual hygiene and energy access, enabling girls to continue studying safely at night while maintaining dignity during menstruation. Her leadership earned recognition through the Mandela Washington Fellowship Leadership Impact Award. **“Education and dignity should never be limited by access to hygiene or electricity,” Mayanja explains.** Her work demonstrates how WASH innovation can directly support education equity while strengthening opportunities for girls in rural Uganda.

Léna Tall Faye | Senegal
Founder & CEO, Delta SA and Chairperson, DELVIC



Léna is a pioneering sanitation entrepreneur transforming the management of urban waste systems in Senegal. As founder and CEO of Delta SA and chairperson of DELVIC, she has professionalised faecal sludge management and elevated sanitation from an informal service into a structured industry. Her leadership has enabled private sector participation in sanitation infrastructure and strengthened public private partnerships with the National Sanitation Office of Senegal. She also played a key operational role in deploying the Janicki Omniprocessor pilot in Dakar, an innovation that converts sewage into clean water, electricity, and reusable ash. Sanitation is not only a public health necessity, it is an opportunity for innovation and dignity,” she says. Through entrepreneurship and advocacy, she has created jobs, modernised waste management systems, and positioned Senegal as a global reference point for sanitation innovation.



Lumbie Mlambo | Zimbabwe

Founder and CEO, JB Dondolo

Lumbie Mlambo is a Zimbabwean social entrepreneur advancing clean water access and gender equity through the nonprofit JB Dondolo. Raised in rural Zimbabwe, she experienced the daily burden of water collection, a challenge that inspired her to establish the organisation in 2016 to expand access to sustainable water infrastructure. Under her leadership, JB Dondolo partners with scientific institutions and engineers to install boreholes, filtration systems, and solar powered water infrastructure in underserved communities. These projects improve community health, reduce waterborne diseases, and restore time for women and girls to pursue education and economic opportunities. Her initiatives have already impacted more than 120,000 people by bringing reliable water access to schools, clinics, and rural villages. **“Clean water is not charity. It is dignity and opportunity,” Mlambo emphasises, highlighting her mission to link water access directly to poverty reduction and gender empowerment.**



Matlhogonolo Mmese | Botswana

Hydrogeoscientist and Groundwater Researcher

Matlhogonolo Mmese is an emerging hydrogeoscientist working to secure groundwater resources in Botswana. Her research focuses on understanding aquifer systems and improving access to safe groundwater in rural areas where boreholes often suffer from high salinity or limited recharge. Recognised through the SADC Groundwater Management Institute Young Professionals programme, Mmese studies the Khakhea Bray Transboundary Aquifer shared between Botswana and South Africa. Her work develops conceptual groundwater models that help governments and water managers understand aquifer behaviour, water quality, and sustainable extraction limits. As one of the few women specialising in hydrogeology in the region, she also advocates for greater female participation in STEM fields. **“Scientific data is essential for managing water resources responsibly,” she notes.** Through rigorous research and regional collaboration, Mmese is helping build a more resilient and science driven groundwater future for southern Africa.



Ndeye Amy Kebe | Senegal

Founder and CEO, Jokalante

Ndeye Amy Kebe is a Senegalese digital innovator transforming how farmers access water and climate information through technology. As founder of Jokalante, she developed a platform that translates meteorological and irrigation data into voice based mobile services accessible to rural farmers across Senegal. The system bridges the gap between farmers and the national meteorological agency, delivering practical guidance on rainfall patterns, irrigation needs, and climate risks through simple mobile phones in multiple local languages. Her innovation also integrates artificial intelligence tools that personalise water management advice based on crop type, soil conditions, and weather forecasts. Through the “TIC Mbay” programme, the platform has already supported tens of thousands of farmers, helping them optimise water use and reduce crop losses. **“Information is power for farmers,” Kebe explains.** Her work represents a major step toward digital climate resilience and smarter water management in West Africa.





Prof. Dr. Corrine Almeida | Cabo Verde
Director, WASCAL Cabo Verde Graduate School and
Professor of Biological Oceanography

Prof. Dr. Corrine Almeida is a leading marine scientist strengthening climate and water resilience in West Africa. As Director of the Cabo Verde Graduate School of the West African Science Service Centre on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL), she oversees a regional programme dedicated to understanding the relationship between ocean systems, climate change, and water security. Her research focuses on marine ecosystems that protect coastal environments and groundwater systems from erosion, storm surges, and saltwater intrusion. Almeida also leads international scientific collaborations that train West African researchers in advanced oceanographic monitoring and climate analysis. By studying coral ecosystems, marine biodiversity, and ocean temperature shifts, her work provides the scientific foundation for sustainable coastal management in Cabo Verde. Through mentorship and regional research coordination, she is building a new generation of African scientists equipped to manage climate risks and protect vital marine and water resources across the Atlantic region.



Rokiatou Traoré | Mali
Founder, HEROU Alliance

Rokiatou Traoré is a climate resilience entrepreneur working to strengthen rural livelihoods and environmental restoration in Mali. As founder of HEROU Alliance, she has developed an inclusive agricultural value chain centred on moringa cultivation, a drought resistant crop that supports nutrition, soil regeneration, and economic opportunity in the Sahel. Her initiative mobilises thousands of women and youth farmers, providing training in sustainable agroforestry and climate smart agriculture. By diversifying rural incomes and restoring degraded landscapes, Traoré's work helps communities adapt to changing rainfall patterns and declining agricultural productivity. Beyond entrepreneurship, she contributes to international climate dialogue through engagement with the African Group of Negotiators on agriculture. Her long-term vision includes expanding agroforestry programs and planting millions of trees to strengthen environmental resilience across West Africa. Through community leadership and climate advocacy, Traoré is helping build a more sustainable and economically resilient Sahel.



Safia Abdi Haase | Somalia
Humanitarian Health and Dignity Advocate

Safia Abdi Haase is a visionary humanitarian linking health, water, sanitation, and dignity in fragile contexts. Born in Somalia and based in Norway, she has spent decades protecting women and girls affected by conflict and displacement. A trained nurse and the first African woman knighted in Norway (Knight 1st Class, Order of St. Olav), Haase integrates gender-sensitive WASH with reproductive health and humanitarian response. She stresses that "water security is inseparable from bodily security," advocating safe, private access to water and sanitation to prevent gender-based violence. Through the Amatheia Foundation and partner organisations, she trains teams to deliver community-centred interventions across refugee camps and post-conflict settings. Her leadership demonstrates that WASH is not just infrastructure; it safeguards lives, restores dignity, and empowers women. By combining frontline action with policy advocacy, Haase exemplifies humanitarian innovation and human-rights driven WASH globally.





Tamarah Moutotekema Boussamba | Gabon
Founder & CEO, AGRIDIS; UNICEF Youth Climate Advocate

Tamarah Moutotekema Boussamba is a Gabonese climate advocate and social entrepreneur focused on resilient water, food and watershed management. In 2023, she was appointed as a UNICEF Youth Climate Advocate for Gabon, recognising her role in mobilising youth and advancing sustainable environmental practices in a nation where rainforest and watershed protection is vital for water security. As founder and CEO of AGRIDIS and co-founder of the Wagui digital platform, she uses technology to support rural farmers with climate-smart advisory tools that promote sustainable production and protect key water resources. Boussamba has also played a leadership role at the One Forest Summit, where she brought youth perspectives to high-level dialogue on forest and water conservation. Her work bridges grassroots action and policy engagement, positioning youth-led innovation at the heart of climate resilience in Central Africa.

Yvette Ishimwe | Rwanda
Founder & CEO, Iriba Water Group



Yvette Ishimwe is a Rwandan water innovator whose enterprise has expanded affordable, safe drinking water access across her country and beyond. As founder and CEO of Iriba Water Group, she has implemented climate-smart water systems, including rainwater harvesting and public water points that serve urban and peri-urban communities. Her enterprise provides clean water 70 % cheaper than bottled alternatives, meeting the needs of low-income populations. Ishimwe's work has been recognised internationally, including winning the \$100,000 African Youth Adaptation Solutions Challenge at COP27 and earlier honours such as the Queen's Young Leader Award and Invest2Impact prizes. Through community training and local job creation, she blends entrepreneurial leadership with climate adaptation, demonstrating how innovative WASH solutions can advance equitable water access and economic empowerment across Rwanda and the wider region





Credit: constructionreviewonline.com

In Casablanca, Africa's largest desalination facility is transforming water access and women's leadership in the sector. The Casablanca Seawater Desalination Plant, producing 300 million cubic metres annually for 7.5 million people, relies on reverse osmosis and renewable energy to deliver safe, reliable water.

At the forefront of water quality management is Salma Bougarrani- pictured here-in, who leads monitoring and treatment optimisation to ensure the highest safety standards. Her work includes developing protocols to detect contaminants early, training plant staff, and designing community outreach programmes that build trust in desalinated water. Her contributions have earned national recognition for advancing public health and environmental sustainability.

For women, reliable water reduces domestic burdens and opens opportunities in education and employment, while Bougarrani's leadership models a path for women in STEM and water governance. Casablanca demonstrates that water quality innovation and gender inclusion can flow from the same source, turning infrastructure into empowerment.



Voices from African Women In WASH Allies



“When women have access to safe water and sanitation, they gain time, dignity, and opportunity. Investing in WASH is not only about infrastructure- it is about unlocking the potential of women and transforming entire communities.”

– Melinda French Gates, Co-chair, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (former)

Water security is central to climate resilience and sustainable development. Integrating gender equality into water governance is not optional; it is essential for delivering inclusive and lasting solutions.

– Alex Simalabwi, Executive Secretary, Global Water Partnership

Providing clean water is more than charity it’s empowerment. Women and communities benefit when access is safe, reliable, and treated as a shared resource.

– Mr. Beast, YouTube Creator and Water Advocate

Building resilient WASH systems depends on women’s leadership. Humanity makes progress when women and girls advance and we must work together to accelerate that progress

–Rajiv Shah, President, Rockefeller Foundation

Water is a human right, and gender equality multiplies impact. Supporting women in WASH ensures communities are healthier, more prosperous, and more resilient.

–Wendy Schmidt, Founder, Schmidt Family Foundation





Credit: © Frankie Rignace

Research, Data & Knowledge Leaders

EVIDENCE IS THE FOUNDATION OF EFFECTIVE WASH SYSTEMS, TURNING KNOWLEDGE INTO IMPACT AT SCALE AND ENSURING NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND.

On the Photo is 30-year-old Athina Antoine, a marine engineering graduate and Nature Seychelles' Reef Rescuers team measuring records of coral fragments. Through data-driven research, evidence-based studies, and innovative scholarship, African women in this category generate the knowledge that shapes water, sanitation, and hygiene systems across the continent. Their work informs policy, guides sustainable infrastructure, and strengthens service delivery, ensuring that decisions are grounded in rigorous evidence. They produce actionable insights, build data systems, and bridge research with practice, translating science into solutions that respond to real-world challenges. Beyond research, they mentor the next generation of WASH professionals and embed gender, climate resilience, and equity into science, policy, and applied interventions, ensuring that knowledge drives inclusive and lasting impact.





Alina Kadhila | Namibia
Hydrogeologist, Namibia Water Corporation (NamWater)

Alina Kadhila is a distinguished hydrogeologist at NamWater, where she safeguards Namibia's most precious resource: groundwater. In one of Africa's driest nations, her expertise ensures sustainable water supply for urban centres and rural settlements alike. She has led critical interventions during crises, including coordinating solutions for groundwater depletion at Aus Settlement, bridging government agencies, utilities, and international partners. Beyond her technical work, Alina champions gender equity and youth inclusion in water science. As a steering committee member of the Early Career Hydrogeologists' Network under the International Association of Hydrogeologists, she mentors emerging African scientists and advocates for dismantling the traditionally male-dominated culture of water management. **"Effective water management is as much about people as it is about geology. We must ensure our communities, especially women and youth, are part of every solution," she explains.** Alina's holistic approach combines rigorous science with social impact, making her a role model for the next generation of African water leaders.



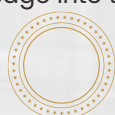
Dr. Anyse Sofia Pereira | Cabo Verde
IPCC Scientific Capacity Specialist, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

Anyse Sofia Pereira is a leading water security researcher pioneering climate-smart solutions in Cabo Verde. She integrates cutting-edge technologies, including atmospheric water generation and super-hydrophilic materials, to address the archipelago's severe water scarcity. Her work bridges high-level research with community-based interventions, creating sustainable, decentralised water systems for households and agriculture. As a vocal advocate for inclusive water governance, Anyse ensures technological innovation benefits women, youth, and marginalised communities. She mentors emerging scientists and serves as a technical expert on global platforms, including the International Water Institute's Women Plus Water network, championing the Water-Energy-Food Nexus. **"Innovation only matters if it reaches the people who need it most. Science must serve society, not just labs," she says.** By combining research, field application, and mentorship, Anyse exemplifies African women leading the transformation of water resilience and food security.



H.E. Dr. Diaka Sidibé | Guinea
Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation

"Education and research are the backbone of sustainable water management. Without local expertise, even the best resources remain untapped," says Dr Diaka Sidibé, reflecting the vision that has guided her career. Dr Sidibé combines scientific excellence with statesmanship, shaping Guinea's water and environmental future. A geologist by training with a Doctorate in Geology, Environment, and Natural Hydrological Hazards, she became the first woman to lead the Institut Supérieur des Mines et Géologie de Boké, nurturing the country's technical expertise in natural resource management. Today, as Guinea's Minister of Higher Education, she oversees reforms to train the next generation of water engineers. Her leadership extends across West Africa as Chair of the WASCAL Ministerial Council, coordinating climate resilience initiatives in 12 nations. She also brokered a €76 million UK-Guinea partnership, providing clean water access to 1.2 million people. Dr Sidibé exemplifies scientific leadership transforming knowledge into tangible social and environmental impact.



Dr. Laurinda de Jesus Fernandes Hoygaard | Angola

Rector, Universidade Agostinho Neto

"Strong institutions are the foundation for lasting public service and equitable water access," says Dr. Laurinda de Jesus Fernandes Hoygaard, reflecting her career-long dedication to governance and education

Dr. Hoygaard is the first woman to serve as Rector of Angola's largest university, where she has strengthened the analytical and leadership capacities of public sector professionals. Her work in curriculum development, research, and policy dialogue equips a new generation to tackle governance challenges in sectors including water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). Nationally recognised as Professor Emerita, she combines intellectual rigour with visionary leadership, embedding accountability frameworks and evidence-based decision-making into institutional culture. Through her academic influence, Dr. Hoygaard has indirectly advanced equitable WASH access across Angola, shaping informed leaders who can deliver sustainable public services. Her legacy demonstrates how high-level academic leadership can translate into tangible societal benefits, bridging knowledge, policy, and community impact.



Dr. Marie-Annick Lamy-Giner | Mauritius

Geographer and Researcher, University of La Réunion

A meticulous geographer, she provides critical evidence to guide Mauritius' water management amidst competing demands from tourism, agriculture, and population growth. Her comparative analyses on SDG 6 and SDG 14 identify governance gaps and inform long-term climate-resilient infrastructure planning.

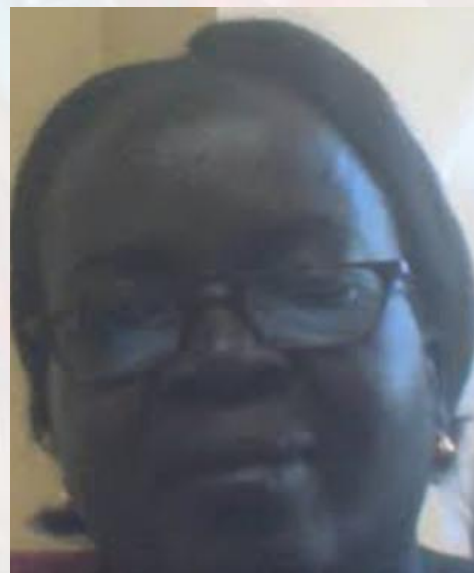
Through regional academic networks, Dr. Lamy-Giner champions "maritime and terrestrial integration," linking environmental science with policy. Her benchmarking of Mauritian water and port infrastructure against regional neighbours ensures that decision-makers can plan strategically for sustainable development. By translating technical research into actionable guidance, she has cemented Mauritius as a model of island resilience and innovation, demonstrating the power of scientific leadership in safeguarding both ecosystems and human communities. **"Island survival depends on understanding the delicate balance between human needs and natural resources,"** Dr. Marie-Annick Lamy-Giner asserts, reflecting the core of her research on water security



Dr. Mindekem Rolande | Chad

National Coordinator, Centre de Support en Santé Internationale (CSSI)

"Clean water is more than a resource, it is the lifeline of every community," says Dr. Mindekem Rolande, summarising her work at the intersection of health, environment, and human development. Dr. Rolande applies a "One Health" approach, integrating human, animal, and environmental health to prevent waterborne and neglected tropical diseases in Chad. She coordinates high-stakes vaccination campaigns, WASH-integrated maternal care, and emergency response programs, ensuring hygiene protocols are embedded into daily practice in rural health centres. A leading researcher and collaborator with the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Dr. Rolande has shaped national disease prevention policies and influenced WHO guidance through her peer-reviewed work. Her leadership has reduced child mortality, strengthened institutional capacity, and built community trust, proving that evidence-based sanitation interventions are central to lasting public health and community resilience.





“Wetlands and mangroves are only recently being recognised as climate superheroes, yet much about them is still unknown,” says Corinne, the team leader. “Our project showcases their biodiversity and ecosystem services through research, building partnerships, advocating for their protection, and promoting collaborative conservation efforts.”

“A key part of my role involves building and maintaining relationships, essentially talking to and listening to people, and working together to find solutions for enhancing wetland conservation,” she explains. “I hope to help shift mindsets so that everyone truly appreciates the value of these rich ecosystems.”

Corinne and Esthel of Nature Seychelles testing drones for wetlands mapping, Credit: natureseychelles.org





Dr. Muna Musnad | Sudan
Director of Research and Innovation, UNESCO Chair in Water Resources (UCWR)

"Water is both a lifeline and a bridge between communities—scientific evidence must guide cooperation," says Dr. Muna Musnad, reflecting her work across the Nile Basin. As Director of Research and Innovation at UCWR in Khartoum, Dr. Musnad blends high-level water governance with technical engineering. For over two decades, she has addressed Sudan's critical water challenges, from urban flooding in Khartoum to transboundary Nile water management, providing the data and modelling essential for informed policy. A founding member of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network, she champions female scientists' inclusion in high-stakes negotiations. Her pioneering use of remote sensing and GIS for flood mapping has enhanced early warning systems, safeguarding vulnerable communities. Dr. Musnad's leadership ensures that Sudanese water policy not only protects lives but also promotes sustainable development, gender equity, and regional stability.



Dr. Namizata Binaté Fofana | Côte d'Ivoire
Coordinator, United Nations University Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (UNU-INRA)

"True water governance must reflect the voices and needs of women," says Dr. Namizata Binaté Fofana, capturing the ethos of her career. Dr. Binaté Fofana integrates economics and field research to ensure Côte d'Ivoire's water and land policies are equitable and sustainable. As UNU-INRA Coordinator and senior researcher at CIRES, she has translated data on rural women's interaction with water systems into actionable national policies. Her tenure as Director General for Women, Child Protection, and the Family advanced gender-responsive budgeting in the water sector, ensuring infrastructure projects consider safety, privacy, and economic empowerment. Through the Francophone Observatory for Gender-Inclusive Development, she has shifted policymakers' focus from women as beneficiaries to active managers and leaders in water governance, championing Total Sanitation initiatives that transform communities.



Dr. Raoudha Gafrej | Tunisia
General Director, Univers de l'Eau (Water World)

"Every drop counts; managing water wisely is a matter of survival and justice," Dr. Raoudha Gafrej asserts, reflecting her pioneering work in Tunisia. A hydraulic engineer and national authority on water sobriety, Dr. Gafrej leads Tunisia's strategies against drought, authoring the National Drought Management Plan and advising on climate-resilient frameworks for international bodies like the World Bank. She has been central to restoring wetlands, promoting wastewater reuse, and mentoring engineers to consider ecological health alongside infrastructure. Recognized as an Accredited International Expert, she bridges complex hydraulic modelling with practical policy, ensuring urban and rural water systems remain resilient. Her advocacy at forums such as the 5th Mediterranean Water Forum demonstrates how scientific rigour can influence sustainable development, protect freshwater ecosystems, and secure Tunisia's water future.





Fadji Z. Maina | Niger
Earth Scientist and Water Resources Specialist, NASA

“When we can see the Earth from space, we can no longer ignore what it is telling us, our future depends on using science to protect every drop of water,” says Fadji Z. Maina.

As the first Nigerian scientist to join NASA, Maina uses satellite technology and advanced hydrological modelling to reveal how climate change reshapes the Sahel’s most vulnerable water basins. Her work connects the water-land-climate nexus, offering critical insights into groundwater recharge, agricultural sustainability, and long-term adaptation strategies that safeguard communities in arid regions. She also trains young African scientists, builds local technical capacity, and collaborates with regional governments to translate scientific findings into actionable policies that strengthen resilience against droughts and food insecurity. Beyond technical innovation, she champions the Scientist-Policy bridge, urging that Africa’s infrastructure and resilience strategies be guided by rigorous evidence. Recognised on the Forbes 30 Under 30 list in Science, Maina is redefining how data and local expertise secure water futures across the continent

Loubna Hamidi | Comoros
Vice Chair & Country Representative, Women in Marine Science Network (WiMS)

"Science gives us the tools to safeguard our seas and the communities that depend on them," says Loubna Hamidi, highlighting her commitment to evidence-based action in Comoros.

As Vice Chair and Country Representative for Comoros in the Women in Marine Science Network (WiMS), she champions the participation of women and youth in marine research, climate adaptation, and sustainable blue economy initiatives. Her work strengthens local and regional capacity, connecting scientific knowledge with practical solutions for coastal resilience.

Raised on Moheli Island, Loubna has led programs to enhance environmental awareness, mentor emerging women scientists, and foster community engagement in ocean conservation. She has contributed to regional networks documenting climate impacts, sustainable fisheries, and water resource management, ensuring policies reflect both ecological and social realities. Through leadership, mentorship, and advocacy, Loubna Hamidi is advancing inclusive marine science and positioning Comoros as a model for gender-equitable, evidence-driven environmental stewardship.



Prof. Myriam Sidibé | Mali
Founder and CEO of Brands on a Mission

Professor Myriam Sidibé has spent over two decades transforming how the world approaches hygiene, sanitation, and human dignity. Her journey began with a childhood accident in Mali: at age ten, she fell into a septic tank.

She recalls the moment vividly: “I fell into a septic tank when I was 10 years old. I thought I would die... It was a real awakening that having access to basic systems like safe sanitation and toilets is the foundation of social justice.”

She demonstrates how businesses can drive social impact while delivering results. Today, as Founder and CEO of Brands on a Mission, Honorary Professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and board member of WaterAid and MSI Reproductive Choices, she continues to champion dignity-driven WASH programmes that empower communities as active participants rather than passive recipients.



That experience inspired a lifelong mission to move beyond infrastructure and focus on human behaviour in public health. Trained as a Civil and Environmental Engineer at McGill and Loughborough, Sidibé has led groundbreaking initiatives such as Lifebuoy’s Help a Child Reach 5 campaign and co-founded Global Handwashing Day, reaching over one billion people globally.



“A pipe without a habit is just a hollow tube. Behaviour change is the true foundation of lasting health.” -Prof. Myriam Sidibé

Dr. Yamina Bouchikh | Algeria
Researcher in Bacteriology, Djilali Liabes University

Dr. Yamina Bouchikh is a pioneering Algerian microbiologist whose work safeguards public hygiene and water safety nationwide. Recognised by the Algerian presidency for her contributions to bacteriology, she applies cutting-edge research to understand microbial ecosystems and their impact on water quality and sanitation. Her projects, including the TANMU initiative, transform bacterial cellulose into sustainable, eco-friendly materials, bridging laboratory science with practical environmental solutions. Dr. Bouchikh is committed to translating complex microbiological knowledge into community and policy impact, ensuring safer water systems and promoting ecological innovation. She emphasises, “Bacteria are not just agents of disease – they are intelligent and fruitful partners in building sustainable communities.” Her leadership exemplifies how scientific innovation can drive resilience, public health, and sustainable development across Algeria.



Sylvanna Antat | Seychelles

Marine Research Officer, Seychelles National Parks Authority



Sylvanna Antat is a leading voice in marine conservation in Seychelles, protecting some of the world's most fragile coral reefs and coastal ecosystems. At the Seychelles National Parks Authority, she monitors habitats, manages marine protected areas, and translates complex scientific data into practical strategies that sustain biodiversity, clean water, and climate-resilient communities. Her work extends beyond research into community engagement, where she promotes awareness of the vital connection between healthy ecosystems and water security. By fostering stewardship among local stakeholders, she ensures conservation efforts are both inclusive and sustainable. Recognised for her technical expertise and collaborative leadership, Sylvanna is part of a new generation of African women advancing environmental science and WASH. Her work not only safeguards marine ecosystems but also strengthens livelihoods and water systems, positioning her as a key contributor to sustainable development across island and coastal regions.


Vannie Djounguep | Cameroon

Founder and Executive Director, Africa Resilience Association (ARA)

We cannot talk about sustainability while waste is still wasted. The solutions we need are already in our communities; we just have to transform how we use them.

Vannie Djounguep is a Cameroonian sociologist and gender expert advancing resilience, environmental innovation, and inclusive development. As Founder and Executive Director of the Africa Resilience Association, she empowers informal sector workers through advocacy, skills development, and sustainable enterprise solutions. She promotes Biochar Cocoa, transforming agricultural waste into a climate-smart product that improves soil fertility, captures carbon, and enhances water quality. Her work integrates environmental protection with economic opportunity. Recognised by global institutions, Vannie continues to champion gender equity, climate resilience, and sustainable livelihoods, positioning her among Africa's emerging leaders in WASH and community development.





Lake Retba in Senegal, often called Lac Rose, is one of Africa's most visually striking bodies of water, famous for its pink hue caused by salt-loving algae. Beyond its colour, the lake is deeply tied to the lives and livelihoods of women who work there every day. For decades, women have been central to the lake's salt-harvesting economy. They wade into the highly saline water, often for hours, collecting salt that settles at the bottom. To protect their skin from the harsh conditions, many coat themselves in shea butter before entering the water. The work is physically demanding, yet it provides a vital source of income for families and supports local markets. These women are not just labourers; they are custodians of a traditional industry that sustains the community. Their presence in the pink waters has become an iconic image, symbolising resilience, economic agency, and the intersection of natural resources and livelihoods. In many ways, Lake Retba tells a broader story about women in Africa who transform environmental challenges into opportunity.

Credit: pinterest.com



Voices from African Women In WASH Allies

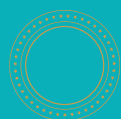


Scientific knowledge and women's leadership in water converge to create innovative solutions. Empowering women fosters sustainability, local resilience, and equitable development.

- Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, Former President of Mauritius

Economies can't sustain themselves if half your population don't have access to education, don't have access to markets, don't have access to land tenure. Women face incredible hurdles in this journey to equality

-Reeta Roy, President & CEO of the Mastercard Foundation.





Development, Civil Society and Advocacy Leaders

**RIGHTS, INSTITUTIONAL
ACCOUNTABILITY, WASH FOR ALL,
POLICY, GOOD GOVERNANCE,
MOBILISATION, ADVOCACY AND
LASTING IMPACT ARE AT THE
HEART OF THEIR WORK.**

The photo shows from Left, A member of Women Collective, the formidable Matilda Kimeto, a water workers trade union leader and Vanessa Nakate a Climate Justice Activist. African women in WASH in this category lead NGOs, Civil Society Organisations, UN agencies, Professional associations, Trade Unions, Knowledge networks, and trade unions, driving systemic change in WASH across the continent. They hold institutions accountable, mobilise communities, protect WASH workers rights and translate policy, governance, and sector knowledge into tangible, lasting impact. Their leadership bridges advocacy, programme implementation, sector-wide coordination, and professional development, embedding equity, climate resilience, and inclusion into water, sanitation, and hygiene services. Through this, they make WASH services reliable, equitable, and accessible for all, ensuring WASH agenda is localised and no one is left behind.





Adzoavi Nyuito Tatey | Togo
Executive Director, ONG ALAFIA

Adzoavi Nyuito Tatey is a transformative leader in WASH, pioneering “sanitation entrepreneurship” in Togo that places women at the heart of sustainable solutions. Through her leadership of ONG ALAFIA and the social enterprise Hateka, she has mobilised communities to build over 1,000 affordable, hygienic latrines using local materials, directly reducing the cost barrier to sanitation. Her initiatives link menstrual hygiene to school attendance and economic empowerment, demonstrating a holistic approach to community wellbeing. Partnering with UNICEF, she has implemented Community-Led Total Sanitation programs across dozens of villages, training women as financial stewards to ensure long-term water point functionality. By combining innovation, climate-resilient materials, and institutional accountability, Adzoavi exemplifies WASH leadership that is locally owned, scalable, and deeply impactful, making her a standout candidate for recognition.



Aminata Traoré | Mali

Civil Society Leader, Author, Former Minister of Culture

Aminata Traoré redefines WASH through culture, dignity, and civic empowerment. Recipient of the 2004 Prince Claus Award and the 2021 ethecon Blue Planet Award, she has transformed water access into a framework of social justice, linking hygiene and sanitation to economic independence and decolonisation. Through initiatives at the Hampâté Bâ Cultural Centre, Traoré mobilises women using the Malian concept of

“Water is not just a resource; it is a mirror of justice,” she often asserts, highlighting the inseparable connection between access and equity.

Sutura—discretion, protection, dignity—turning water points into sites of cultural and political empowerment. Her research with UNDP pioneered the intersection of women’s labour and water access in the Sahel, while her advocacy ensures that water governance confronts global and local inequities. Traoré’s work elevates sanitation from infrastructure to a human-rights imperative, making her a seminal figure in African WASH leadership.



Cecilia Akintomide | Nigeria

Chair, Operations Committee, Sanitation and Hygiene Fund (SHF); Former VP & Secretary General, AfDB

Cecilia Akintomide is a powerhouse in global WASH finance and governance. As Chair of the UN-hosted SHF, she drives innovative investment models, including the Capital M initiative for menstrual health, transforming sanitation from aid-dependent to economically empowering. Previously, as Vice President and Secretary General of the African Development Bank, she led the General Capital Increase, catalysing continental infrastructure development. A lawyer by training, she blends legal precision with strategic vision, ensuring projects are scalable, accountable, and gender-responsive. Akintomide’s work elevates sanitation as a cornerstone of national prosperity and women’s empowerment, making her a transformative force in shaping sustainable WASH systems across Africa.



Claudine Talon | Benin

First Lady & Founder, Fondation Claudine Talon

Claudine Talon has transformed the role of First Lady by moving from ceremonial advocacy to strategic, data-driven leadership in social infrastructure. Through the Fondation Claudine Talon, established in 2017, she champions sanitation and hygiene as foundational to dignity, health, and development in Benin. Her flagship initiative, Gestion de l'hygiène menstruelle en milieu scolaire, provides modern sanitary facilities, reusable menstrual kits, and gender-inclusive education, significantly reducing school absenteeism among girls. The Foundation has installed sustainable water points and hand-washing stations in hundreds of schools and health centres, pairing infrastructure with rigorous hygiene education to combat water-related diseases. By leveraging both domestic and international partnerships, Claudine Talon has turned WASH investment into a national movement, demonstrating how targeted interventions can drive systemic improvements in education, health, and women's empowerment.



Djuikouou Ndeffo Christine Flore Talla'a | Cameroon | President & CEO | Toilets for All / Sublime Grâce

Christine Flore Talla'a, known as "Maman Toilettes," is a visionary leader in Cameroon's sanitation and urban engineering sector. As President of Toilets for All and CEO of Sublime Grâce, she has elevated sanitation to a national priority, pioneering gender-sensitive infrastructure for vulnerable populations. A Circular Economy innovator, she converts waste into organic fertiliser and biogas, transforming sanitation from a public health challenge into an economic opportunity. Christine integrates industrial engineering, social advocacy, and education through initiatives like WASH Clubs in schools and mass public campaigns, challenging cultural taboos and embedding hygiene into national policy. Recognised by APAA and AfWASA, she represents Cameroon on continental WASH platforms, influencing policy and innovation. Her work exemplifies how engineering, entrepreneurship, and advocacy can converge to improve public health, economic development, and human rights.



Dr. Amaka Godfrey | Nigeria

Executive Director, International Programmes, WaterAid

Dr. Amaka Godfrey is a distinguished WASH leader from Nigeria, overseeing WaterAid's international programmes across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. With over 25 years' experience in engineering, public health, and development, she drives systemic, government-led water and sanitation reforms. Holding a PhD in Civil and Building Engineering from Loughborough University, she combines technical rigour with strategic insight into socio-economic barriers to water security. She advocates for gender-responsive WASH policies, highlighting their role in women's education and economic empowerment. Through leadership roles in AMCOW and the Open Government Partnership, Dr. Godfrey advances inclusive sanitation frameworks, ensuring marginalised communities shape infrastructure investment and policy. Her work integrates clean water access, health, and economic development, positioning her as a transformative figure in global WASH leadership.



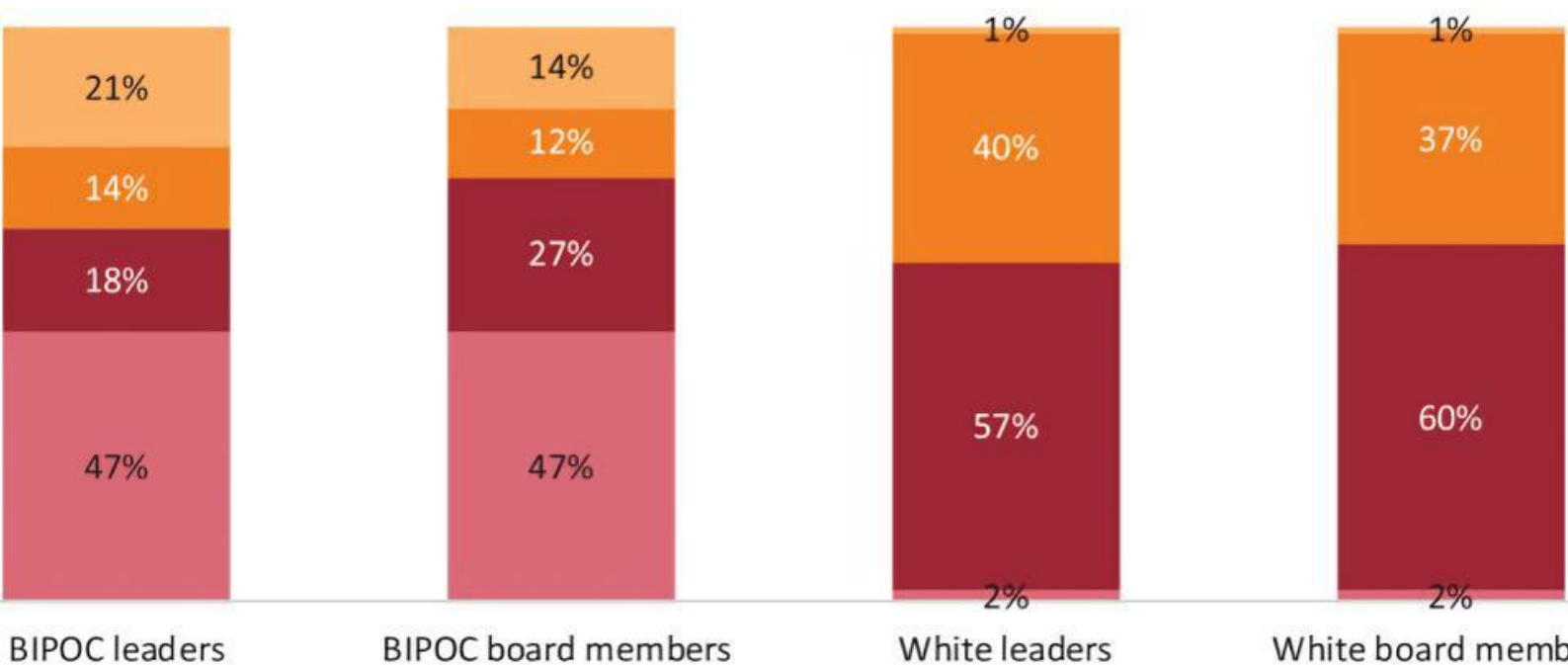
Leadership for SDG 6.2: Is Diversity Missing?



Despite global progress on sanitation, leadership in the sector remains overwhelmingly dominated by older, white men from High-Income Countries. Research shows that two-thirds of sanitation leaders are white, with white leaders 8.7 times more likely to hold multiple positions than Black, Indigenous, or other People of Color. Eighty-eight out of 100 organizations are headquartered in High-Income Countries, and BIPOC women are the least represented group. Highlighting African women in WASH leadership is crucial—not just for equity, but because diverse perspectives drive more effective, inclusive sanitation solutions. Supporting and amplifying their voices is essential if we are to meet SDG 6.2 and ensure safe sanitation for all.

DEMOGRAPHICS BY RACE

■ Men LMIC ■ Men HIC ■ Women HIC ■ Women LMIC



Source, Worsham, K., Sylvester, R., Hales, G., McWilliams, K., & Luseka, E. (2021). Leadership for SDG 6.2: Is Diversity Missing? Environmental Health Insights, 15, 1–13. DOI: 10.1177/11786302211031846





Basilia Nanbigne | Executive Secretary Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation

Basilia is a seasoned development leader and Executive Secretary of the Ghana Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS), with over 15 years of experience advancing advocacy, policy reform, and multi-stakeholder coordination across the WASH sector. She has played a pivotal role in shaping national and global WASH agendas, driving inclusive, evidence-based policies that prioritize vulnerable communities, especially women and girls. Basilia led advocacy efforts that contributed to Ghana's signing of the Sanitation and Water for All Presidential Compact in 2024 and championed menstrual hygiene reforms that improved access and affordability for schoolgirls nationwide. She has also influenced national policy through the CSO WASH Manifesto and strengthened sector coordination mechanisms. A respected voice in global WASH platforms, Basilia is widely recognised for bridging grassroots realities with policy action, advancing climate-resilient, gender-responsive solutions, and inspiring the next generation of women leaders across Africa.



Dr. Priscilla Achakpa | Nigeria Founder, Global Lead, Women Environmental Programme

Dr. Priscilla Achakpa is a leading environmental activist from Nigeria, advocating for the intersection of gender equality, climate resilience, and sustainable water management. As founder of the Women Environmental Programme (WEP), she ensures vulnerable communities, particularly women and youth, shape WASH and environmental policy. Recognised as an Ashoka Fellow, recipient of the 2022 Albert Ballin Award, and named one of the "100 Nigerians Leading Change," she transforms grassroots challenges into systemic, international solutions. Her work has advanced SDG 6 implementation across Africa, integrating ecological limits with human rights. Through media and global platforms, she is celebrated as an "Eco Hero," championing gender-responsive budgeting, protecting water ecosystems, and ensuring that water and sanitation infrastructure is inclusive, equitable, and climate-resilient.



H.E. Bogolo Joy Kenewendo | Botswana Cabinet Minister of Minerals and Energy

Bogolo Joy Kenewendo is a global climate finance leader from Botswana, shaping the continent's energy and water future. As Minister of Minerals and Energy, she drives "Green Industrialisation," linking resource management with sustainable water systems and community upliftment. Previously, as Special Advisor to the UN Climate Change High-Level Champions for COP27 and COP28, she contributed to the \$20 billion UN Climate Action Projects Compendium, prioritising climate-smart infrastructure across Africa. Recognised as a TIME100 Next

On her approach, she says, "Sustainable development is only possible when we align finance, policy, and communities around equitable resource management."

honouree and a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader, she champions a Just Energy Transition, ensuring economic growth and climate adaptation coexist. Her leadership positions Botswana as a continental model for sustainable resource governance and resilient, inclusive growth.



Jane Nabunnya Mulumba | Uganda

Country Director, IRC WASH

Jane Nabunnya Mulumba is a leading force in Uganda's WASH sector, with nearly two decades of experience driving systems-level reform. As Country Director for IRC Uganda, she has championed sustainable service delivery by strengthening government systems, local capacity, and cross-sector partnerships. Her leadership in multi-district programmes, particularly in Kabarole and Bunyangabu, has expanded access to safe water and improved sanitation outcomes through integrated planning. Beginning her career with the Nile Basin Initiative, she built a foundation in stakeholder coordination and inclusive water governance. At IRC, she advanced the Sustainable Services at Scale agenda, ensuring long-term functionality of WASH infrastructure. Her work bridges evidence, policy, and practice, embedding resilience into both rural and urban systems. Recognised across sector networks, Jane continues to shape Uganda's WASH landscape through a commitment to sustainable, inclusive, and government-led solutions.



Joana Tomás | Angola

Secretary-General, Organization of Angolan Women

Joana is a transformative leader advancing gender equity and water security in Angola. As Secretary-General of the Organization of Angolan Women, she has redefined how women engage with natural resource management. Her flagship Kudima Project empowers rural women as leaders in agricultural water use, earning international recognition, including the 2023 International Prize for Women's Empowerment. Joana's impact lies in her ability to connect policy reform with grassroots change. She successfully advocated for microfinance access tailored to women, enabling the adoption of water-efficient irrigation technologies and strengthening economic independence. This shift has repositioned women from unpaid labourers to agricultural entrepreneurs. By embedding gender-responsive approaches into national frameworks, she has created a scalable model for climate resilience and rural development. Her leadership demonstrates how women's organisations can drive systemic change, ensuring water access translates into economic power and long-term sustainability.



Matilda Kimetto | Kenya

President & Secretary General, Water Services Workers Union

On her philosophy, she says, "A resilient water sector begins with workers who are protected, valued, and included."

Matilda Kimetto is a formidable advocate for workforce dignity and gender equity in Kenya's WASH sector. As President and Secretary General of the Water Services Workers Union, she founded the country's first union representing water and sanitation workers across public and private providers. Under her leadership, the union has secured collective bargaining agreements, statutory pensions, and protections against casualisation, embedding labour rights into sector performance. Beyond labour advocacy, Kimetto has driven gender-responsive reforms, ensuring women benefit from fair recruitment, promotion, maternity protection, and safe working conditions. She has consistently framed workforce welfare as central to reliable service delivery and national development. Her leadership links social protection with operational excellence, positioning Kenya as a continental model for workforce-led WASH transformation that is inclusive, resilient, and equitable.





Najla Mohamed-Lamin

Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic Founder, Almasar Library Centre

Najla Mohamed-Lamin is a globally recognised women's rights and climate activist, named one of BBC's 100 most inspiring women in 2023. She founded the Almasar Library Centre in Tindouf refugee camps, creating safe educational spaces on health, water, environment, and climate resilience. Her leadership directly tackles water and food insecurity worsened by climate change, positioning women as custodians of community resilience in one of the world's most climate-exposed regions. By mobilising women and youth, she reframes adaptation as a grassroots agenda, embedding dignity and self-reliance into displacement contexts. On her approach, she says, **"Empowered women are the frontline of climate resilience – they protect our water, our food, and our future."** Mohamed-Lamin's work links women's rights with climate adaptation, making the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic a symbol of global recognition in WASH and environmental justice.



Saran Kaba Jones | Liberia

Founder & CEO, FACE Africa

Saran Kaba Jones is a transformative WASH leader, rebuilding Liberia's water systems through FACE Africa since 2009. Moving beyond charity, she applies a social enterprise model that combines philanthropy, partnerships, and local empowerment. Her Rural Water Sustainability Framework ensures that safe water systems are backed by governance, technical training, and behavioural change programs. By eliminating "broken pump syndrome," Saran equips communities with skills to independently maintain infrastructure, drastically reducing system failures and the long, dangerous walks for water, especially for women and girls. She elevates youth and women into primary decision-making roles, turning water management into social equity. **She says, "Water access is not charity, it is the foundation of freedom, dignity, and opportunity."** Recognised as a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader and TIME Next Generation Leader, Saran bridges rural realities with global policy, creating scalable, African-led WASH solutions.



Sareen Malik | Kenya

Executive Secretary, African Civil Society Network on Water and Sanitation

Sareen Malik is a leading civil society and WASH accountability advocate in Africa, with over 15 years' experience championing the human right to water across more than 50 countries. As Executive Secretary of ANEW, she spearheads initiatives that expose and combat "sex for water" abuses, ensuring women and marginalized communities have safe access to water without coercion. Her leadership bridges grassroots realities with international policy platforms, including the UN and Sanitation and Water for All, strengthening civil society engagement in water governance. Malik emphasises local ownership of WASH solutions while fostering accountability, transparency, and systemic monitoring of water rights. She notes, "Ensuring safe water access is not charity; it is a matter of dignity and justice." Through advocacy, network-building, and decolonising narratives around water, she has positioned African civil society at the forefront of sustainable, equitable, and rights-based WASH development.



Vanessa Nakate | Uganda
Founder, Rise Up Movement



Credit: © The Boston Globe

Vanessa Nakate is a globally recognised Ugandan climate justice activist and founder of the Rise Up Movement, amplifying African voices in global climate debates. She highlights the disproportionate impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities, particularly how droughts, floods, and extreme weather threaten livelihoods, agriculture, and access to clean water across Africa. Nakate has brought these realities to major platforms, including the United Nations Climate Change Conference and the World Economic Forum, while earning accolades such as the Goalkeepers Global Goals Award and BBC 100 Women recognition. Beyond advocacy, she drives practical solutions for climate resilience, including the Green Schools Project, promoting renewable energy, environmental sustainability, and water conservation in schools. **She emphasises, “Climate justice is water justice – no one should have to choose between survival and access to clean water.”** Nakate ensures that African communities facing water scarcity are central to global climate solutions.

Veronica de Klerk | Namibia
Founder, Women’s Action for Development

“Empowering women to manage water resources transforms not just households, but entire communities,” Veronica notes.

Veronica de Klerk has empowered over 15,000 rural Namibian women to participate in sustainable water management and community resource governance. As founder of Women’s Action for Development, she links literacy and hygiene training with local leadership, ensuring women’s voices are central to WASH decision-making. Her initiatives demonstrate how grassroots mobilisation can shift social norms, strengthen hygiene practices, and embed gender-focused empowerment into national water and sanitation systems. Through strategic advocacy and education, de Klerk positions Namibia as a model for sustainable, community-driven resilience in WASH, highlighting how gender equity and empowerment are essential for lasting improvements in water access and hygiene practices.



Women Lead Figuig's Anti-Water Privatisation Protests



Credit: © AP News

In Figuig, an oasis town in eastern Morocco, residents have been protesting since late 2023 against reforms that would transfer water management to a regional multi-service company. While authorities present the move as necessary to address drought and improve efficiency, many residents see it as a step toward privatisation. They fear losing control over long-standing community-managed water systems, facing higher water costs, and having decisions made outside the town.



Credit: © AP News

Figuig relies on underground aquifers and locally governed distribution systems that are deeply embedded in social organisation and shared responsibility. For many, the reforms threaten not only access to water, but also a way of managing resources collectively. A key moment came in January 2024, when women led a large march through the town. Dressed in white, they signalled peaceful resistance, dignity, and unity. The march was part of sustained protests held regularly over several months, including demonstrations and refusal to pay water bills. Women's central role reflects their everyday responsibility for securing and managing water in households, as well as their direct exposure to shortages and rising costs. Their presence has helped sustain the movement and frame it as both a social and political struggle over control, access, and rights.



Voices from African Women In WASH Allies



Access to water and sanitation is foundational to economic empowerment. When women have reliable services, they can invest their time in education, livelihoods, and leadership; transforming households and economies.

– Francis Musinguzi, Regional Director for Africa, Water.org

Water justice is gender justice. Civil society must continue to amplify community voices, especially women’s voices, to ensure that policies translate into equitable access and sustainable impact on the ground. Addressing issues like sextortion in water collection and service delivery is critical to protecting women’s dignity and safety.

–Malesi Shivaji, CEO, Kenya Water and Sanitation Civil Society Network

The human rights to water and sanitation cannot be realized without addressing gender inequality. Women must be at the centre of water governance not as beneficiaries, but as decision-makers shaping equitable and just systems.

– Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation

Water diplomacy must be inclusive. Women’s leadership is critical in building cooperation, preventing conflict, and ensuring that shared water resources become instruments of peace and collective prosperity.

– Retno Marsudi, Former Foreign Minister of Indonesia; UN Water Leadership Advocate



Marcher sur l'eau

A film about water, climate change and women

A photograph of three women in a vast, arid desert landscape. They are walking away from the camera, carrying large, colorful water containers on their heads and backs. The women are dressed in traditional, colorful clothing. The background shows a flat, sandy terrain with sparse, dry vegetation under a clear sky.

Media, Arts & Storytelling Leaders

Credit: unesco.org

THROUGH ART AND STORYTELLING, IDEAS BECOME INFLUENCE, AND VISIBILITY INSPIRES ACTION

The photo shows Aïssa Maïga's documentary, *Above Water* (*Marcher sur l'eau*) set in Niger, that highlights the severe water scarcity caused by climate change through the story of a village's struggle to secure a well. African women in this category shape how water, sanitation, and hygiene are understood, valued, and prioritised across society. Through media, arts, film, and storytelling, they translate complex challenges into compelling narratives that influence public perception, drive behaviour change, and hold institutions accountable. Their work amplifies community voices and lived experiences, ensuring that Indigenous, marginalised, and grassroots perspectives inform policy, investment, and action. By transforming stories into powerful tools for advocacy, behavioural and cultural change, they elevate WASH from a technical issue to a shared social and human priority.



Aïda Muluneh | Ethiopia Visual Artist Water Life Initiative

Aïda Muluneh has redefined how the global water crisis is seen, shifting it from statistics to striking visual narratives that centre dignity, identity, and power. A world-renowned Ethiopian photographer and cultural entrepreneur, she is widely recognised for her Water Life series, commissioned by WaterAid, which blends high-fashion aesthetics with Afrofuturist symbolism to illuminate water scarcity. Rejecting reductive portrayals of poverty, Muluneh presents African women as powerful protagonists, reframing the “gender burden” of water collection as a systemic barrier to education, health, and autonomy. Her work has been exhibited on some of the world’s most influential art and policy platforms, engaging audiences far beyond traditional development spaces. “Art has the power to reshape how we understand injustice,” she notes. “If we change how we see water, we change how we value it.” As founder of Addis Foto Fest and DESTA for Africa, Muluneh has institutionalised creative advocacy, mentoring emerging African artists to use visual storytelling as a tool for social and environmental change. Her historic role as the first Black woman to co-curate the Nobel Peace Prize exhibition, alongside her presence in major collections such as MoMA and the Smithsonian, underscores her global influence. Muluneh’s work demonstrates that solving the WASH crisis requires more than infrastructure. It demands a cultural shift. By transforming perception, she has helped elevate water security into a human rights conversation rooted in dignity and representation.



In this image, the pipes represent the urban water grid, and the tap symbols disconnection from it. “Some areas in Addis Ababa can go for weeks without access to clean water,” says Aïda
Credit: © 2025 Aïda Muluneh Studio





Aïssa Maïga | Senegal / Niger
Film Director and Climate Justice Advocate

Aïssa Maïga has emerged as a powerful directorial voice in climate justice, using cinema to bring the lived realities of water scarcity into global focus. Her documentary *Above Water* (*Marcher sur l'eau*) tells the story of Tatiste, a village in Niger where water lies deep but remains inaccessible, shaping every aspect of daily life. Rather than relying on familiar tropes, Maïga centres the human consequences of environmental neglect, particularly the climate-migration nexus that forces families to separate in search of survival.

“I did not want to show suffering as spectacle,” she explains. “I wanted to show how water defines the future of a community.”

Her storytelling is intimate and deliberate, offering audiences a nuanced understanding of resilience, dignity, and systemic inequity. The film’s selection at the Cannes Film Festival and its César Award nomination elevated the Sahel’s water crisis to elite cinematic and policy spaces, amplifying calls for groundwater sovereignty, climate resilience, and girls’ education. Maïga’s transition from acclaimed actress to filmmaker reflects a strategic evolution in advocacy. By harnessing the emotional power of film, she has created a platform that connects global audiences to local realities, influencing both public discourse and policy attention. Her work stands as a compelling reminder that access to water is not only an environmental issue, but a question of justice, identity, and human dignity.



Anna Mayimona Ngemba | Democratic Republic of Congo,
Media Strategist & Gender Justice Advocate, Africa Barometer

Anna Mayimona Ngemba has positioned herself as a critical voice at the intersection of media, gender, and development in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A veteran journalist and contributor to the Africa Barometer 2024, she has reshaped national discourse on water and sanitation by highlighting the lived realities of women and girls.

“For women, Water is not just about availability,” she states. “It is about safety, dignity, and the right to exist without fear.”

Her work goes beyond reporting. It challenges structural inequalities, particularly in conflict-affected regions where accessing water exposes women to significant safety risks. By reframing the conversation from access to safety and dignity, Ngemba has influenced both public awareness and policy engagement. Through her strategic use of media platforms, she bridges the gap between storytelling and advocacy, ensuring that gendered vulnerabilities are neither overlooked nor normalised. Her reporting amplifies marginalised voices while holding institutions accountable for systemic failures. Ngemba’s influence lies in her ability to disrupt narratives and redirect attention to overlooked dimensions of the WASH sector. By centring gender justice, she has helped redefine what meaningful access to water truly entails in fragile contexts.



Catherine Constantinides | South Africa
Environmental Activist and Media Advocate

“Young people are not just the future,” she says. “They are the force driving change today.”

Catherine Constantinides has become one of South Africa’s most recognisable voices linking water security to climate justice. Through her work across media, youth mobilisation, and advocacy platforms, she has transformed public engagement with environmental issues. From mentoring young leaders on national television to co-founding Generation Earth, her approach combines visibility with action. Her #SaveWater campaign alone mobilised over 100,000 students, embedding water conservation into youth culture and everyday behaviour. Her influence extends to global platforms, including the United Nations Human Rights Council, where she has consistently framed water as a fundamental human right within climate discourse. Her recognition as an Ubuntu Award winner and Archbishop Tutu Leadership Fellow reflects both credibility and impact. Constantinides demonstrates how media can be leveraged to shift narratives and inspire collective action. By connecting local realities with global conversations, she has positioned South Africa as a leader in advocacy-driven environmental change.



Douce Namwezi N’Ibamba | Democratic Republic of Congo
Founder and Media Advocate for Menstrual Equity, Uwezo Afrika Initiative



Douce Namwezi N’Ibamba has built a pioneering model that merges media, advocacy, and service delivery to advance menstrual equity in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Beginning her career in radio at 16, she went on to co-found MAMA RADIO, a platform dedicated to gender equality. Through the Uwezo Afrika Initiative, she has addressed both the cultural stigma and practical barriers surrounding menstrual health, distributing medical-grade kits to girls in conflict-affected areas and enabling them to remain in school. Menstrual health is not a privilege,” she asserts. “It is a fundamental right tied to dignity and opportunity.” Her work demonstrates how grassroots innovation can create scalable solutions in fragile contexts. By combining awareness with tangible support, she has developed a holistic approach that is both impactful and replicable across the continent.



FLUSHFORUM

#flushforum #worldtoiletday2018

WORLD TOILET DAY 2018



I Pledge...



Anele Mdoda, a South African media personality from the Eastern Cape, has used her platform to address one of the country's most urgent yet overlooked challenges: unsafe school sanitation. Beginning in 2018, she partnered with Domestos and mobilized public support through crowdfunding campaigns to build safe, dignified toilets in underserved schools. Her first project broke ground in 2019 at Themba lethu Primary School, bringing together government, private sector partners, and local communities. This work is critical in a context where many schools still rely on dangerous pit latrines, placing children, especially girls at risk. By combining advocacy with practical action, Mdoda has helped restore dignity and safety in learning environments, demonstrating how public influence can drive meaningful change. Her efforts continue to highlight sanitation not just as infrastructure, but as a matter of equity, health, and human dignity.





Enid Ninsiima | Uganda, Investigative Journalist (WASH), Independent Media / National Broadcasters Advocate

Enid Ninsiima has redefined WASH journalism in Uganda through investigative reporting that holds institutions accountable. Her work has uncovered critical gaps in sanitation and water provision, prompting audits and reforms across multiple districts. By bringing overlooked issues into national conversation, she has transformed hygiene from a marginal topic into a policy priority. Her reporting has reached wide audiences, driving both awareness and action. "Accountability begins with information," she notes. "People must know what is failing before it can be fixed." Recognised with the Uganda Press Freedom Award, Ninsiima has set a benchmark for evidence-based reporting in the sector. Her work demonstrates the power of journalism to catalyse systemic change and strengthen public oversight.



**Molatelo Bossman | South Africa
Filmmaker and Director, Bolobathaba Media Group**

Molatelo Bossman is an award-winning South African filmmaker whose documentary *Hung Out Dry* exposes the enduring failures of water provision in rural communities. Initially conceived as a simple observation of villagers' daily struggle for water in Block 5, Bolobedu, the project evolved into a powerful indictment of decades of systematic corruption and mismanagement. "The title *Hung Out Dry* reflects how the community has been left hanging by those elected to serve them," Bossman explains. The film captures children waiting at dry taps, families forced to purchase water from neighbours, and public health campaigns on handwashing rendered meaningless without a reliable supply. What appears on the surface as drought is, in reality, a story of broken promises, political neglect, and governance failure. *Hung Out Dry* has screened internationally, including at the BRICS Film Festival in Moscow and the African Film Festival in the United States. By combining immersive storytelling with investigative rigor, Bossman transforms local water struggles into a global call for accountability. Her work underscores that access to water remains a deeply political human rights issue in South Africa, even 30 years after the advent of democracy.



WITNESS A STORY THAT NEEDS TELLING

Impure is a groundbreaking Kenyan film written and directed by women, confronting menstrual stigma through unflinching storytelling. The narrative follows a 12-year-old girl navigating period-related discrimination at school, giving voice to experiences that are often silenced. **"We wanted to tell a story that many girls live but few people see,"** the creators explain, emphasising their commitment to authentic, gender-driven storytelling. By blending narrative cinema with advocacy, Impure has sparked national conversations on menstrual health, dignity, and the right to education. Impact so far: The film has been screened across multiple counties in Kenya, from Nairobi and informal settlements such as Kibera to refugee camps including Kakuma, with structured discussions for students, teachers, parents and community leaders. Audiences report changed perceptions of menstrual stigma, increased understanding among boys and girls, and greater awareness of menstrual equity as a human rights issue. Impure had its North American premiere at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City and continues to support policy dialogue and educational campaigns across Kenya. The film shows how women filmmakers can use storytelling to advance gender equity, challenge societal taboos, and transform WASH advocacy. Impure is not just a film, it is a movement led by women for women.

Impure

Credit: FilmAid Kenya

COMMON LIGHT PICTURES PRESENT "IMPURE" INTRODUCING EUNICE RUWA CATHERINE NOKU NURA MWANGI MILICENT MWANZA KILAWA JOSEPH WAMBUA TALIA SAMUEL WITH THE SPECIAL APPEARANCE OF JANET MBUGUA
CASTING BY GODWIN WAMBUA DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY IGNACIO HENNIGS EDITED BY RICO HERRE LOCATION SOUND MIXING VICTOR JOE DESMOND OKEYO POST-PRODUCTION SOUND MIXING OLEKSANDR SHEVSHENKO COLORIST MAREN HENKE
ORIGINAL MUSIC BY IBRAHIM SIDEDE VOCAL PERFORMANCES BY THE GIRLS CHORALE OF KENYA AND THE WESTLANDS SCHOOL GIRLS CHOIR COSTUME AND MAKEUP KHADIJA ABDULLADIR SCRIPT SUPERVISOR IRENE NOKU
PRODUCTION MANAGER WILLIAM ODE SUPPORTED BY UNEPA TAP MEDIA LTD. KWALE ARTS CBO CODAK CBO CHILDREN OF AFRICA ASSOCIATION AND TOGETHER FOR BETTER FOUNDATION
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS PETRA SEEWALD MAYURI ODEORA-STRAUB CO-PRODUCED BY KHADIJA ABDULLADIR PRODUCED BY RICO HERRE IGNACIO HENNIGS WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY RICO HERRE

Voices from African Women In WASH Allies



Water no get enemy. But when access is unequal, when systems fail communities, and when the most vulnerable are left behind, water becomes a source of injustice. Water weaponisation is real. We must treat water as a shared right, managed with equity, unity, and accountability for all.

– Femi Kuti, Musician, Activist, and Social Commentator





Credit: Unicef SouthSudan

Community and Grassroot Leaders

WOMEN LEAD FROM THE FRONTLINES OF WASH, SAFEGUARDING HERITAGE, PRESERVING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE, MAINTAINING PEACEFUL COMMUNITIES AND AMPLIFYING LOCAL VOICES TO BUILD RESILIENT, THRIVING COMMUNITIES.

The photo shows A Community Water Committee in Hai Sluk in Rubkona, South Sudan. One member was not present when the picture was taken. This category profiles African women at the community and grassroots level; the custodians of water, sanitation, and hygiene. Rooted in Indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions, they safeguard heritage, preserve ecosystems, and empower communities to manage water sustainably. Transforming unpaid burdens into leadership, they organise, advocate, and ensure marginalised voices are heard. At the frontline of climate adaptation and resilience, these champions demonstrate that sustainable WASH solutions are most effective when built from the ground up, with culture and knowledge guiding every decision.



Cécile Bibiane Ndjebet | Cameroon
Founder, REFACOF



Cécile Bibiane Ndjebet is a transformative force in Cameroon’s environmental sector, bridging scientific forestry and rural women’s land rights. As founder of REFACOF, she mobilizes a 20-nation network to secure land and forest rights, linking women’s empowerment to ecosystem restoration. Her efforts have restored 650 hectares of degraded land, proving that protecting forests and water is impossible without securing women’s rights. Globally recognised, she was named UN Champion of the Earth (2022) and awarded the Gulbenkian Prize for Humanity (2023). Ndjebet’s leadership demonstrates that women’s participation in resource governance delivers ecological resilience and social transformation. **“Restoring the earth is impossible without restoring the rights of those who guard it,”** she emphasises. Her advocacy has made Cameroon a continental leader in rights-based environmental management. Through initiatives like the Cameroon Ecology Foundation, she ensures forests thrive, water access is secure, and communities—especially women—transition from subsistence to sustainable stewardship.

Celina Cossa | Mozambique
President, National Peasants’ Union (UNAC)

“Local ownership is the cornerstone of resilience,” she notes.

Celina Cossa has spent over four decades transforming Mozambique’s rural development landscape. As founding President of UNAC, she grew a grassroots collective into a national movement of 100,000+ members, championing Resource Sovereignty; the principle that communities must control the land and water they depend on. After the Mozambican Civil War, Cossa created community water committees that empowered women to lead WASH governance, drastically reducing waterborne diseases and ensuring sustainability. Her influence extends from advocacy for the 1997 Land Law to mobilizing women in post-conflict regions. Internationally recognized, she was included among the 1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize and received the FANRPAN Civil Society Award (2009). Cossa’s model proves that grassroots innovation can achieve what top-down interventions often cannot, linking health, empowerment, and sustainable water management across Africa.





In Nairobi's low-income neighborhoods, where piped water remains unreliable, informal vendors play a vital role in ensuring access. Esther Njuguna, a 38-year-old mother of four, has spent the past 8 years delivering water using a two-wheeled cart, supplying up to 260 liters daily to households in need. Like many women in urban informal settlements, her work is physically demanding yet essential, filling critical gaps in service delivery. Water vending not only supports livelihoods but also sustains communities often overlooked by formal systems. Despite the challenges, women like Esther continue to beat the odds, turning necessity into enterprise and advancing pro-poor water access at the grassroots level.

Credit: BIKO MACOINS/AFP

Esther Njuguna, 38, poses during her water delivery with a two-wheeled cart in Nairobi, Kenya



Rachael Walambo | Central African Republic
Chairperson, Kpetene Water Committee

Rachael leads community resilience in Ndele, transforming a solar-powered borehole from a flashpoint for conflict into a “Source of Peace.” As Chairperson of the Kpetene Water Committee, she coordinates water access, infrastructure maintenance, and transparent financial management, serving thousands in a region scarred by conflict. Her secret? Social diplomacy. By mediating disputes between ethnic and religious groups at the pump, Rachael fosters co-ownership and reconciliation.

“Clean water is the first step toward quenching the thirst for lasting peace,” she says.

Her leadership shows that technical WASH interventions succeed only when women guide them. Rachael’s work is a blueprint for how equitable water management can become a tool for social cohesion and community-driven conflict resolution, demonstrating that peace and water security are inseparable in fragile contexts.



Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim | Chad
Founder, Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad (AFPAT)



Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim is a globally respected environmental activist and geographer from the Mbororo pastoralist community of Chad, whose work champions the inclusion of indigenous women and communities in climate and water governance. She founded and leads the Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad (AFPAT), which bridges traditional ecological knowledge with cutting-edge tools like 3D participatory mapping to sustainably manage scarce water resources in the Sahel. Ibrahim’s leadership spans high-level global climate diplomacy-co-chairing the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change and serving as a United Nations SDG Advocate; to grassroots adaptation strategies that strengthen Lake Chad ecosystems threatened by climate change. Awarded the Pritzker Emerging Environmental Genius Award and recognized by Time Magazine as one of 15 women leading climate action, she insists, “**For centuries, indigenous peoples have protected the environment...now it’s time to protect their knowledge. Listen, include, act.**”





Credit: gulfnews.com

‘Mama Kanga’: Nigeria’s ‘Well Woman’

In many parts of Lagos, Nigeria, access to clean water depends not on public systems, but on wells like this- hand-dug lifelines serving entire communities. Behind many of them is Ololade Rabi, known as “Mama Kanga,” a pioneer in Nigeria’s informal water sector. At 54, the mother of six has spent nearly four decades drilling wells in underserved areas, mastering a trade traditionally dominated by men. Since 1997, she has located underground water sources and overseen the excavation of wells reaching depths of over 130 feet. Her work is both physically demanding and socially vital. In densely populated neighbourhoods where piped water is unreliable, these wells reduce dependence on unsafe sources and costly vendors. Through resilience and skill, Mama Kanga has transformed a marginalized profession into a platform for impact- quietly sustaining communities, one well at a time.



Sياما جوما | South Sudan

Chairperson, Water Management Committee (Kapoeta)



Sياما جوما is the iron-willed guardian of Kapoeta's water, a woman whose leadership is etched into the very survival of the Atalabara community in South Sudan. As the Chairperson of the Water Management Committee, she has transformed a simple borehole into a symbol of collective defiance against infrastructure failure. While others wait for government intervention, Sياما took command in 2018, dismantling a broken system where 50% of local water collections were lost to ineffective municipal fees. She fought to reclaim those funds, establishing a sovereign community treasury that has since self-financed the replacement of a massive 5,000-liter storage tank and the complete overhaul of a solar-powered pumping system. Her presence at the water point is one of absolute authority; she personally enforces the bylaws that protect the equipment from misuse and ensures that even the most entitled individuals respect the community's shared resource. By living the mantra that "a burden shared is a burden halved," Sياما has proven that a woman's technical oversight is the most reliable bridge between a dry tap and a thriving village.

Sارجو جالو | The Gambia

Community Leader, Jarra Madina

Sارجو جالو has transformed Jarra Madina in The Gambia by advocating for clean, climate-resilient water access. As head of her local women's group, she led the adoption of solar-powered water systems and school sanitation facilities, improving hygiene and reducing the burden of water collection on women and girls. Her efforts increased school attendance, particularly among girls, and ensured WASH interventions were integrated into daily community life. "When women lead in water management, entire communities thrive," she notes.

Through the Climate Smart Rural WASH Development Project, Sارجو has elevated women's voices in local governance, connecting technical solutions to social realities. Her leadership strengthens both infrastructure and community cohesion, proving that committed grassroots champions can turn development projects into life-changing outcomes.





Credit: ©Oluomo Worldwide



Gambia's Oyster Women

Along the winding waterways of the Gambia, oyster harvesting is almost entirely a women's domain, over 90 percent of the industry is female-led. Members of the TRY Oyster Women's Association, such as Marie Sambou and Fatou Janha, navigate canoes through the mangroves at low tide, chiseling oysters from tangled roots. Their labor is physically demanding, hazardous, and essential. These women are not just harvesters; they are guardians of the mangroves. By using sustainable rack-culturing techniques and seasonal harvesting closures, they protect vital wetland ecosystems that shield communities from storms, store carbon, and nurture fish and bird populations. In doing so, they preserve biodiversity while cultivating livelihoods that strengthen self-reliance and economic independence. Their work transforms water into opportunity: oysters provide income for food, education, and housing, while ancillary projects like handicrafts and climate-smart vegetable farming expand year-round resilience. Recognition on international platforms, including the Equator Prize, has boosted their confidence, empowered collective action, and secured exclusive management rights over the Tanbi wetlands. For these women, every harvest is a statement of strength, stewardship, and vision—a living example of how gender, water, environment and enterprise intersect to shape sustainable communities.





Wangari Maathai (1940–2011) | Kenya
Nobel Laureate & Founder of the Green
Belt Movement

Wangari Maathai, founder of the Green Belt Movement (GBM) and 2004 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, believed that even the smallest actions can ripple into transformative change- a philosophy she described as the hummingbird effect. Born in rural Nyeri, Kenya, she became the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a Ph.D., later teaching veterinary anatomy at the University of Nairobi. In 1977, Maathai launched the GBM to empower women to restore degraded land while securing sustainable livelihoods. Her approach centered on grassroots engagement: women planted trees to reclaim ecosystems, gain income, and assert political agency. Under her leadership, over 51 million trees have been planted, 30,000 women trained in forestry, beekeeping, and food processing, and 4,000+ community groups mobilized to protect forests and watersheds. Each tree planted represented not only environmental restoration but also an entry point for women's empowerment. Maathai's philosophy was simple yet profound: **"African women need to see their strength and be liberated from fear and silence."** By connecting environmental degradation to poverty and gender inequality, she demonstrated that sustainable change starts locally. Through GBM, women gained leadership roles, advocacy skills, and economic independence, showing that small, consistent actions at the community level can spark national transformation. Her legacy endures: vibrant forests, resilient communities, and a generation of women leaders in Kenya and across Africa who continue to prove that even a single hummingbird can change the course of a forest and a nation.

Credit: greenbeltmovement.org



Voices from African Women In WASH Allies



“Justice in water and sanitation is inseparable from social justice. When women lead, communities flourish, and equity becomes the foundation of societal progress.”

– Desmond Tutu, Nobel Laureate, South Africa

Water and sanitation are the foundations of a free and just society. Women’s participation in management ensures dignity, equity, and sustainable transformation.

– Thomas Sankara, Former President, Burkina Faso





Credit: ©Oluomo Worldwide

THE AFRICA WE WANT: Women at the Helm of WASH's Future

THE AFRICA WE WANT is one where water flows freely, sanitation is dignity, economy grows, peace stands, communities thrive, and cultures endure. Across the continent, women are emerging as leaders, innovators, and changemakers. They are transforming water scarcity into opportunity, inequality into empowerment, and communities into resilient systems.

WASH and gender equality are inseparable, touching nearly every aspect of sustainable development. Inequalities in access to water, sanitation, and freshwater resources directly reinforce gender disparities, affecting households, schools, workplaces, and healthcare facilities. The United Nations resolutions on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation call for these rights to be universal, accessible to all, equally and without discrimination.

Yet despite progress, millions still lack access to safe water and sanitation. These gaps disproportionately affect women and girls living in poverty. Gender-based barriers to freshwater resources for productive use, often linked to land rights, further disadvantage certain groups. Women frequently remain under-represented or excluded entirely from WASH-related institutional decision-making, limiting their ability to express concerns, set priorities, and contribute to household, community, and industrial WASH management.

Addressing these inequalities requires more than increasing representation. It is essential to tackle the root causes of socio-economic barriers, ensuring participation is meaningful and not tokenistic. Fulfilment of other basic human rights, including access to education, housing, work, and a safe environment, also reinforces efforts towards gender equality in water. Laws and policies that discriminate against women, directly or indirectly, must be reformed, including frameworks on land tenure, housing, education, and employment. Cultural and socio-economic contexts often conceal hidden obstacles, requiring deliberate attention.

“When women lead, water flows; communities thrive; cultures endure.”

Successful examples are emerging worldwide, from community-level programmes to national policies that foster inclusivity and combat gender-based discrimination. Initiatives range from addressing domestic WASH-related violence to gender mainstreaming in transboundary water cooperation. Gender-responsive and transformative approaches prove that with legislation, education, and bold action, substantive progress is achievable.

Seven Enablers of Gender Equality in WASH

1. Advocacy, Commitment, and Political Will

Strong leadership ensures that commitments are translated into action. In South Africa, all government departments, including those related to WASH, are mandated to have



Transformation Units responsible for gender mainstreaming. Furthermore, the African Union Commission has made gender equality a core objective, driving member states to implement the AU Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment, which mandates integration of gender across all sectors.

2. Legislative and Governance Mechanisms

Explicit legal frameworks are essential. Uganda's Water Act (Act 8 of 1997) recognises the need for gender equality and women's participation in water management committees. Similarly, Kenya's Water Act (No. 43 of 2016) provides a comprehensive framework for sustainable water management, emphasising participation of women and marginalised groups in governance.

3. Human Capital and Financial Resources

Rwanda's National Water Resources Management Policy embeds gender equality as a core principle, supported by the African Development Bank to finance projects that empower women. Many African countries under the Continental Africa Water Investment Programme (AIP) are introducing gender-responsive budgeting to ensure resources reach women effectively.

4. Effective Participation and Parity

Women's leadership is visible at local and national levels. In Ghana, women entrepreneurs and cooperatives, supported by the Ghana Women's Water Association and the Women in Water and Sanitation Africa network, actively lead water management decisions. In Tanzania, Women's Water and Sanitation Committees increase women's bargaining power and leadership in rural areas.

5. Monitoring Systems

Data is essential to track progress. The AIP-PIDA Water Investment Scorecard, piloted in ten African countries including Benin, Cameroon, Malawi, and Uganda, monitors gender considerations in water investments and provides a baseline for integrating gender into national water and climate policies.

6. Awareness Raising, Capacity Development, and Education

Education and training programmes build skills and redefine cultural norms. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has conducted workshops in Ghana to develop women's capacity in rainwater harvesting and gender-transformative approaches. In Somalia, increasing technical training and professional education equips women to enter water management fields.

7. Multi-Stakeholder Coordination

Collaboration ensures gender inclusion across sectors. In Cabo Verde, the National Water Council includes members from the National Institute for Gender Equality and Equity to mainstream gender into national water planning. In Malawi, the Malawi Network of Women in Water facilitates multi-stakeholder collaboration at local levels to influence policy.

Achieving water for all through gender equality requires all stakeholders—practitioners, decision-makers, civil society, private sector actors, and communities—to act together. Women, including those from Indigenous and local communities, hold unique knowledge, perspectives, and solutions that are essential for shaping policies, programmes, financing schemes, and international dialogue. Closing gender gaps is critical for poverty alleviation, fulfilling human rights, and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals.

The inaugural *100 African Women Leading Africa's Water & Sanitation Future Compendium* is a historic milestone. It celebrates courage, innovation, and leadership, inspiring communities, institutions, and peers alike. More than a celebration, it is a launchpad for mentorship, collaboration, and systemic transformation. Held annually, the compendium will highlight women who preserve Indigenous knowledge, strengthen cultural heritage, amplify local voices, and transform water governance across Africa.

Together, we can ensure water flows equitably, communities thrive, and Africa achieves the Agenda 2063 vision of sustainable water security. Investing in women strengthens systems, empowers communities, and builds a continent where dignity, opportunity, and sustainability are the norm. Let this booklet serve as a record of achievement, a source of pride and inspiration, and a benchmark for action—a testament to what has been accomplished and a promise of what is yet to come. We are not just celebrating excellence; we are shaping the future of WASH in Africa, where women lead and communities flourish.

**Do you know a woman making an impact in WASH?
Please reach out to us**

Euphresia Luseka – Robai.Matsi@hotmail.com

Leticia Ackun – Lackun@afwasa.org

Founders, African Women in WASH Awards





"If women were to lower their arms, the sky would fall."
- Proverb by the Fulani tribe of Nigeria

Photo Credit: www.ayekoto.com



| 100 AFRICAN WOMEN LEADING AFRICA'S WASH FUTURE 2026

HONOREES DIRECTORY

Legacy Leader, Page 8-9

Martha Karua

Former Minister for Water Resources Management and Development

Kenya – Government of Kenya

Government and Public Sector Leaders, Page 10-16

H.E. Abida Sidik Mia

Minister of Water and Sanitation

Malawi – Government of Malawi

H.E. Amina NurHussein

Minister of Health

Eritrea – Government of Eritrea

H.E. Anne Désirée Ouloto

Minister of Civil Service and Administration Modernization

Côte d'Ivoire – Government of Côte d'Ivoire

H.E. Dr. Amal Mint Maouloud

Minister of Water and Sanitation

Mauritania – Government of Mauritania

H.E. Fatima Maada Bio

First Lady

Sierra Leone – Government of Sierra Leone

H.E. María Consuelo Nguema Oyana

Minister for Social Affairs and Gender Equality

Equatorial Guinea – Government of Equatorial Guinea

H.E. Pemmy Majodina

Minister of Water and Sanitation

South Africa – Government of South Africa

Bogadi Theresa Mathangwane

Director of Water Affairs

Botswana – Department of Water Affairs

Hadjira Oumouri

Former Member of the National Assembly

Comoros – Femmes en Mouvement

Ines Nefer Ingani

Minister for Women's Promotion and Integration in Development

Congo Brazzaville – Government of Congo Brazzaville

Dr. Nilda Borges da Mata

Minister of Environment and Sustainable Tourism

São Tomé and Príncipe – Government of São Tomé and Príncipe

Justice Nthomeng Majara

Deputy Prime Minister and Chairperson

Lesotho – National SDG Oversight Committee

Tracy Molefi

Senior Coordinator, International Waters Unit

Botswana – Ministry of Lands and Water Affairs

Systems Strengthening Leaders, Page 17-29

Dr. Akissa Bahri

Professor

Tunisia – National Agricultural Institute of Tunisia (INAT)

Asma El Kasmi

Chair of Water, Women and Decision Power

Morocco – UNESCO

Dr. Batsirai Majuru

Technical Officer

Zimbabwe – World Health Organisation (WHO)

atimetou Mint Abdel Malick

President

Mauritania – Nouakchott Regional Council

Eng. Farai Tunhuma

Chief of WASH

Zimbabwe – UNICEF Afghanistan

Dr. Fatima Denton

Director, Burkina Faso – United Nations University Institute For Natural Resources In Africa (UNU-INRA)

Florence Grace Adongo

Former Executive Director, Uganda – Nile Basin Initiative (NBI)

Francisca Pereira

Former Minister For Women's Affairs

Guinea-bissau – Government Of Guinea-bissau

Itireleng Kaunda

Governance & Risk Champion

Botswana – Water Utilities Corporation (WUC)

Katrina Lago Lyetu Kagadhinwa

Chief Information Officer (CIO), Namibia – NamWater Ltd

Laila Iskandar

Former Minister Of State

Egypt – Urban Renewal And Informal Settlements

Malak Altaeb

Non Resident Scholar

Libya – Middle East Institute, Washington DC

Mama Keita

Director, Sub-regional Office For East Africa

Guinea – United Nations Economic Commission For Africa (UNECA)

Mary Nelson Khamis Noah

Technical Expert

South Sudan – Women In Water Diplomacy Network In The Nile

Martine Kessy Ekomo-soignet

Founder And Director

Central African Republic – URU; Peace & Development Watch

RCA

Eng. Mwajuma Waziri

Permanent Secretary, Tanzania – Ministry of Water

Nompumelelo Ntshalintshali-Motsa

Former Africa Coordinator

Eswatini – Sanitation and Water for All (SWA)

Pakinham Mohamed

Civil Engineer

Egypt – Abu Rawash Water Treatment Plant

Prudence Ngwenya

Director, Women, Gender and Youth Directorate

Eswatini – African Union Commission

Dr Rose Christine Kaggwa

Senior Director, Business and Scientific Services

Uganda – National Water and Sewerage Corporation

Rose Mukankomeje

Former Director General

Rwanda – Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA)

Theodora Adomako Adjei

Director of Rural Water Services

Ghana – Community Water and Sanitation Agency

Wambui Gichuri

Former Vice President, Agriculture, Human and Social

Development Complex

Kenya – African Development Bank

Yvonne Magawa

Executive Secretary

Zambia – Eastern and Southern Africa Water and Sanitation

Regulators Association (ESAWAS)

Innovation and Entrepreneurs, Page 30-41

Angela Mwila Kapembwa

Management Specialist

Zambia – BORDA

Avo Ratoarijaona

Founder & CEO

Madagascar – Thing'eo



Beth KOIGI
 Founder & Ceo
 Kenya – Majik Water
 Christa BELLA GATEKA
 Engineer & Technical Leader
 Burundi – Fiadi
 Fatima El Sayed
 Electronics Engineer, ICT Educator & Cert Coordinator
 Sudan – Cert
 Christelle Kwizera
 Founder & Managing Director
 Rwanda – Water Access Rwanda
 Freweini Mebrahtu
 Founder & CEO
 Ethiopia – Mariam Seba Sanitary Products Factory
 Eng. Godliver Businge
 Head Technology Trainer
 Uganda – Global Women’s Water Initiative
 Fatoumata Haidara
 Machine Learning Engineer & Climate WASH Scientist
 Mali – SERVIR West Africa
 Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame
 Global Advocate
 Ghana – Disability Inclusive WASH / UNCRPD
 Gilda Giza Rede
 Electromechanical Technician
 Angola – EPASK
 Justina Haihambo
 Process Engineer
 Namibia – Goreangab Water Reclamation Plant
 Jamila Mayanja
 Founder & Ceo
 Uganda – Smart Girls Uganda
 Léna Tall Faye
 Founder & Ceo; Chairperson
 Senegal – Delta Sa / Delvic
 Lumbie Mlambo
 Founder & CEO
 Zimbabwe – JB Dondolo
 Mathogonolo Mmese
 Hydrogeoscientist
 Botswana – Groundwater Researcher
 Ndeye Amy Kebe
 Founder & CEO
 Senegal – Jokalante
 Prof. Dr. Corrine Almeida
 Director
 Cabo Verde – WASCAL Graduate School
 Rokiatou Traoré
 Founder
 Mali – HEROU Alliance
 Safia Abdi Haase
 Humanitarian Health & Dignity Advocate
 Somalia/Norway – Amatheia Foundation
 Tamarah M. Boussamba
 Founder & CEO; UNICEF Youth Climate Advocate
 Gabon – AGRIDIS / Wagui
 Yvette Ishimwe
 Founder & CEO
 Rwanda – Iriba Water Group

Research, Data & Knowledge Leaders Page 42-50

Athina Antoine
 Marine Engineering Graduate
 Seychelles – Reef Rescuers, Nature Seychelles
 Alina Kadhila
 Hydrogeologist
 Namibia – NamWater
 Dr. Anyse Sofia Pereira
 Scientist
 Cabo Verde – IPCC Capacity Specialist
 H.E. Dr. Diaka Sidibé
 Minister
 Guinea – Higher Education, Research & Innovation
 Dr. Laurinda Hoygaard
 Rector
 Angola – Universidade Agostinho Neto
 Dr. Marie-Annick Lamy-Giner
 Geographer
 Mauritius – University of La Réunion
 Dr. Mindekem Rolande
 National Coordinator
 Chad – CSSI
 Dr. Muna Musnad
 Director of Research & Innovation
 Sudan – UNESCO Chair in Water Resources
 Dr. Namizata Binaté Fofana
 Coordinator
 Côte d’Ivoire – UNU-INRA
 Dr. Raoudha Gafrej
 General Director
 Tunisia – Univers de l’Eau
 Loubna Hamidi
 Vice Chair
 Comoros – Women in Marine Science Network
 Fadji Z. Maina
 Earth Scientist
 Niger – NASA
 Prof. Myriam Sidibé
 Founder & CEO
 Mali – Brands on a Mission
 Dr. Yamina Bouchikh
 Researcher in Bacteriology
 Algeria – Djilali Liabes University
 Sylvanna Antat
 Marine Research Officer
 Seychelles – National Parks Authority
 Vannie Djounguep
 Founder & Executive Director
 Cameroon – Africa Resilience Association

Development, Civil Society & Advocacy Leaders, Page 51-59

Aminata Traoré
 Civil Society Leader, Author
 Mali – Former Minister of Culture
 Adzoavi Nyuito Tatey
 Executive Director
 Togo – ONG ALAFIA
 Cecilia Akintomide
 Chair
 Nigeria – Sanitation & Hygiene Fund; Former VP AfDB



Claudine Talon
First Lady
Benin – Fondation Claudine Talon
Christine Flore Talla'a
President & CEO
Cameroon – Toilets for All / Sublime Grâce
Dr. Amaka Godfrey
Executive Director
Nigeria – WaterAid
Basilia Nanbigne
Executive Secretary
GHANA – Coalition Of NGOs In WASH
Dr. Priscilla Achakpa
Founder
Nigeria – Women Environmental Programme
H.E. Bogolo Joy Kenewendo
Minister
Botswana – Minerals & Energy
Jane Nabunnya Mulumba
Country Director
Uganda – IRC WASH
Joana Tomás
Secretary-General
Angola – Organization of Angolan Women
Matilda Kimetto
President & Secretary General
Kenya – Water Services Workers Union
Najla Mohamed-Lamin
Founder
SADR – Almasar Library Centre
Saran Kaba Jones
Founder & CEO
Liberia – FACE Africa
Sareen Malik
Executive Secretary
Kenya – ANEW
Vanessa Nakate
Founder
Uganda – Rise Up Movement
Veronica de Klerk
Founder
Namibia – Women's Action for Development

Media, Arts & Storytelling Leaders, Page 60-64

Aida Mulneh
Visual Artist
Ethiopia – Water Life Initiative
Anna Mayimona Ngemba
Media Strategist
DRC – Gender Justice Advocate
Aïssa Maïga
Film Director
Senegal/Niger – Climate Justice Advocate
Douce Namwezi N'Ibamba
Founder
DRC – Uwezo Afrika Initiative
Catherine Constantinides
Environmental Activist
South Africa – Media Advocate

Anele Mdoda
Media Personality
South Africa – School Sanitation Advocate
Enid Ninsiima
Investigative Journalist
Uganda – WASH Reporting
Molatelo Bossman
Filmmaker
South Africa – Bolobathaba Media Group

Grassroots Leaders Page 65-69

Cécile Bibiane Ndjebet
Founder
Cameroon – REFACOF
Celina Cossa
President
Mozambique – UNAC
Esther Njuguna
Informal Water Vendor
Kenya – Community Water Services
Rachael Walambo
Chairperson
CAR – Kpetene Water Committee
Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim
Founder
Chad – AFPAT
Ololade Rabiú "Mama Kanga"
Well Driller
Nigeria – Community WASH
Sarjo Jallow
Community Leader
Gambia – Jarra Madina
Siamá Juma
Chairperson
South Sudan – Water Management Committee



REFERENCES

1. African Union Commission. (2026). Theme of the Year 2026 Concept Note: Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063. African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government.
2. FAO. (2025). The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems: 2025 Sub-Saharan Africa Regional Overview. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
3. Global Water Partnership & African Union. (2025). Continental Africa Water Investment Programme (AIP): Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Progress Report. AIP-WACDEP-G Secretariat.
4. Maya Angelou. (1978). *Woman Work*, from *And Still I Rise*. Copyright © 1978 by Maya Angelou. Used with permission.
5. Oluwasanya, G., et al. (2025). *Women in Africa's Water Leadership: Numbers Don't Lie*. United Nations University (UNU-INWEH). ISBN: 978-92-808-6129-7.
6. UN-Water. (2026). World Water Day 2026 Fact Sheet: Water and Gender – Where Water Flows, Equality Grows. United Nations.
7. UN Women & UNDESA. (2024). *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2024*. United Nations Women.
8. UNESCO. (2026). *United Nations World Water Development Report 2026: Water for All People*. UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme.
9. UNESCO. (2026). *Advancing Gender Equality Through Water Data: Case Studies from the WWAP Toolkit*.
10. UNICEF. (2024). *Adolescent Girls' Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: Action Brief*. UNICEF Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Global Program.
11. UNICEF. (2025). *Reducing School Absenteeism Through Menstrual Hygiene Interventions: A Scoping Review of Evidence from African Countries*. UNICEF Africa Regional Office.
12. WHO Regional Committee for Africa. (2025). *Regional Strategy for Accelerating Progress in the Health and Well-being of Women* (Document AFR/RC75/5).
13. WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP). (2024). *Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Schools 2015–2023: Special Focus on Menstrual Health*. World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund.
14. WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP). (2025). *Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene 2000–2024: Special Focus on Inequalities*. World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund.
15. Worsham, K., Sylvester, R., Hales, G., McWilliams, K., & Luseka, E. (2021). *Leadership for SDG 6.2: Is Diversity Missing?* *Environmental Health Insights*, 15, 1–13. DOI: 10.1177/11786302211031846
16. African Union Commission & Global Water Partnership. (2025). *WACDEP-G: Gender Transformative Initiatives in African Water Projects*.

Credit: © hadynyah





Credit: [@Jason Florio](#)

The Gambia's all-female workforce that is protecting the wetland forests. Now their challenge is to earn a sustainable living year-round. African women carry the flow forward just like Oysters we must learn to stick together, growing in clusters where we can have better success as a group than as individuals



African Water and Sanitation Association

Association Africaine de l'Eau et de l'Assainissement

<https://afwasa.org/en/join-us>



<https://www.rural-water-supply.net/join-or-support/join.html>

