

SUSTAINABLE WATER & SANITATION SYSTEMS IN SUPPORT OF AGENDA 2063

Human-Centered Pathways Toward a Water-Secure and Resilient Africa

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Africa Day Indaba

2026 AU Theme of the Year

*"Assuring Sustainable Water
Availability and Safe
Sanitation Systems to
Achieve the Goals of
Agenda 2063"*

Water is Not Just an Infrastructure Problem

"Africa will not achieve Agenda 2063 through infrastructure expansion alone - but through socially sustainable systems that are inclusive, equitable, and community-led."

Dignity

Human right & self-worth

Public Health

Disease, mortality, wellbeing

Gender Justice

Women & girls carry the burden

Livelihoods

Food, agriculture, income

Governance

Who decides, who is excluded

Development

SDGs, Agenda 2063, futures

THE HUMAN REALITY

Africa's water and sanitation crisis – by the numbers

50%

of Africans lack access to safe water

55%

lack basic sanitation & hygiene services

76%

of Sub-Saharan households lack on-premises water

17%

of water ministries in Africa led by women

What this means for people:

- Girls walk hours daily for water – losing classroom time and safety
- Women are 4× more likely than men to bear the water-collection burden
- Inadequate sanitation drives disease, child mortality, and school dropout
- Climate shocks (drought & flood) hit the most excluded communities hardest



Africa Water Vision 2063 — Endorsed February 2026

At the 39th AU Assembly in Addis Ababa, African Heads of State formally launched a landmark continental framework — redefining water as a driver of prosperity, peace, and resilience.

8 Strategic Pillars of the Vision:

Universal Access
to Water & Sanitation

Sustainable Water
Availability

Resilient
Ecosystems

Trusted Data
Systems

Human Capital
Development

Cooperative Basin
Management

Climate-Resilient
Investment

Inclusive
Governance

What is particularly important about this Vision is that it gives Africa an opportunity to prepare not only for current water pressures, but also emerging pressures linked to industrialisation, urbanisation, and rapidly expanding digital infrastructure.

SUSTAINABILITY — WHAT DOES IT ACTUALLY MEAN?

Beyond the pipeline - five interlocking dimensions

Technical

Reliable infrastructure
Functional systems
Long-term capacity

Financial

Affordable services
Sustainable financing
Cost recovery

Social ★

Community ownership
Inclusion & equity
Trust & participation

Institutional

Strong governance
Policy coordination
Accountability

Environmental

Climate resilience
Ecosystem protection
Water conservation
Sustainable digital infrastructure

*The social dimension is most often under-invested - yet it determines whether the other four dimensions hold together.
Communities that do not own, trust, or participate in their water systems will not sustain them.*

Delivering Infrastructure Is Not the Same as Sustaining Systems

Common Failure Modes

- × Top-down implementation – no community input
- × Success measured by taps built, not taps working
- × Vulnerable groups excluded from planning
- × No maintenance systems after handover
- × Weak accountability structures
- × Short-term project logic vs. long-term stewardship

What Socially Sustainable Looks Like

- ✓ Communities as co-creators, not just beneficiaries
- ✓ Women and youth in leadership and governance roles
- ✓ Local institutions with real authority and resources
- ✓ Social accountability mechanisms built in
- ✓ Culturally appropriate service design
- ✓ Long-term stewardship embedded in community identity

GENDER & INCLUSION

The hidden cost of water insecurity

*"Every step a girl takes to collect water is a step away from learning, playing, and safety."
– UNICEF, Cecilia Sharp (2023)*

4×

Women in sub-Saharan Africa are four times more likely than men to bear water-collection duty.

17%

Only 17% of African national water ministries are led by women – yet women are the primary water managers at household level.

12 pts

Countries with over 20% of women representation in political leadership report 12% stronger water access outcomes.

Policies disconnected from lived experience will fail. Water governance requires the voices of those who manage water every day – i.e. the women, youth, and marginalised communities.

Water and Sanitation as Development Enablers

Aspiration 1

Prosperous Africa

Inclusive Growth & Sustainable Development

Water security underpins economic productivity, agriculture, livelihoods, and industry.

Aspiration 6

People-Driven Africa

Inclusive Participation & Community Agency

Sustainable systems must centre community ownership, gender equality, and youth inclusion.

Aspiration 7

Resilient Global Partner

Climate Resilience & Regional Cooperation

Innovation, digital transformation, transboundary governance, and adaptive capacity are non-negotiable.

SDG 6

Clean Water for All

Universal Access & Integrated Management

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

CLIMATE, RESILIENCE & COMMUNITY SURVIVAL

The climate crisis is not abstract – it lands hardest on excluded communities

Climate change is not a future risk for Africa – it is a present reality. Droughts, floods, and irregular rainfall are already limiting access to water for the most vulnerable. Informal settlements, rural communities, and women-headed households bear the brunt.

Infrastructure alone cannot solve this. Communities need:

- Adaptive knowledge and local decision-making power
- Ecosystem protection as a social responsibility
- Early warning systems embedded in community life
- Integrated resource governance, not just pipes



Drought

Intensified scarcity
in already arid zones

Flooding

Infrastructure damage
and displacement

Groundwater

Depletion from
over-extraction

Ecosystem Loss

Reduced natural
water regulation

AI, Water, and the Risk of Deepening Inequality

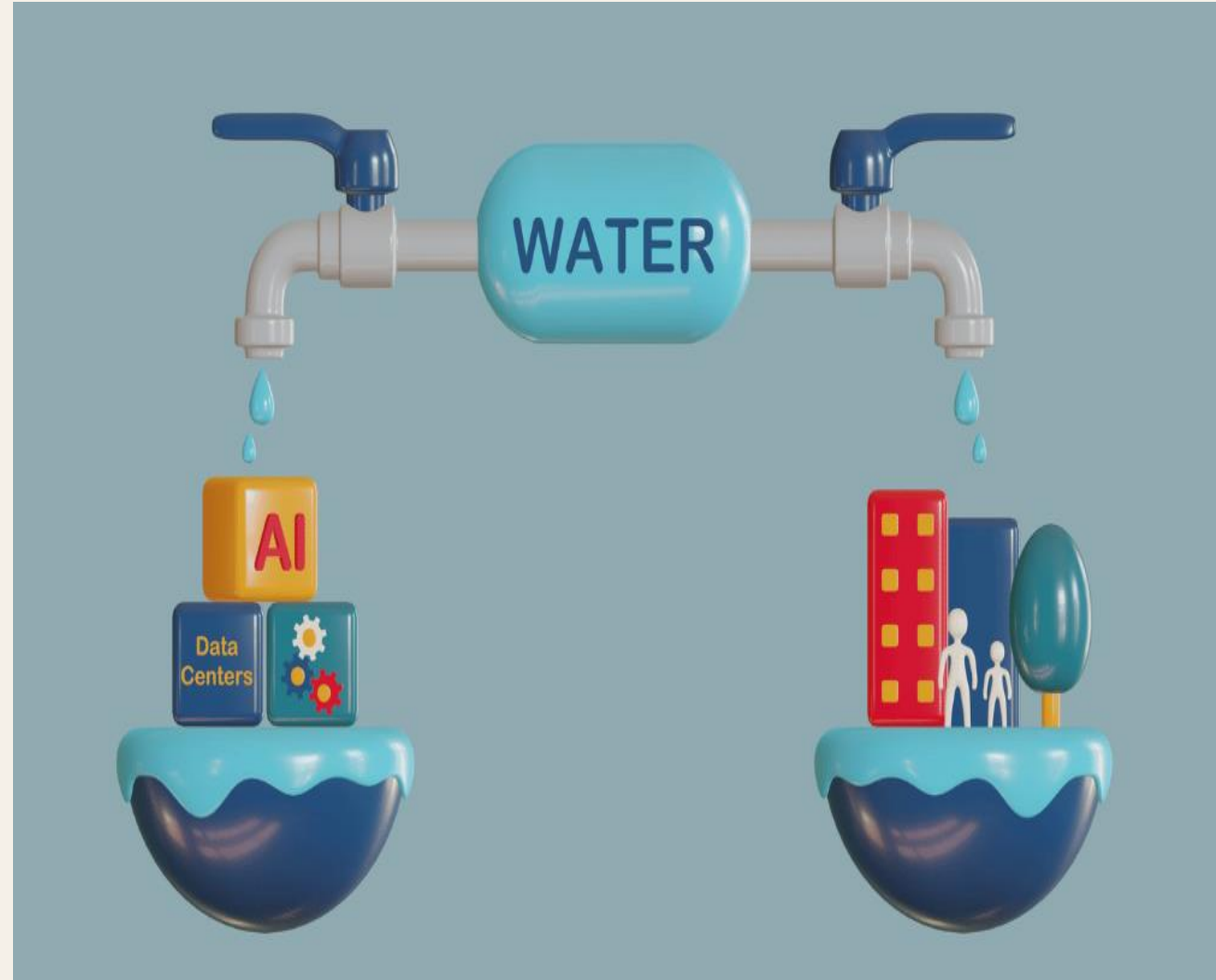
Can Africa pursue digital transformation without deepening water insecurity?

AI Infrastructure Is Physical Infrastructure

- If Africa does not proactively govern water sustainably, emerging industries like AI may intensify existing inequalities and resource pressures - and vulnerable communities will bear the cost first.

Africa's Emerging Water Risk

- The future of water inequality may not only be shaped by droughts and climate change - but also by the invisible resource demands of the technologies powering the modern world.



Building from Within

Strategic Priorities

▶ **Science-based governance**

Data and evidence driving local decision-making

▶ **Digital water management**

Smart systems, AI-assisted leakage monitoring, predictive analytics, and real-time water management

▶ **Youth-led innovation**

Next generation as change agents

▶ **Community research capacity**

Building African knowledge ecosystems

▶ **Skills development**

Investment in the people who manage water

Circular Sanitation Economy

Traditional sanitation approaches treat waste as a problem to be disposed of. The circular sanitation economy treats waste as a resource.

- ✓ Biogas energy production
- ✓ Organic fertiliser from waste
- ✓ Wastewater reuse for agriculture
- ✓ Waste-to-value innovation
- ✓ Green jobs in the circular economy



PATHWAYS FORWARD

Six recommendations for socially sustainable water and sanitation systems

01

Centre Human-Governed Systems

Participation, accountability, and community ownership as non-negotiables

02

Invest in Climate-Resilient Infrastructure

Adaptive systems, ecosystem protection, disaster preparedness, and sustainable digital infrastructure planning

03

Prioritise Inclusive Development

Women, youth, and marginalized groups at the table – not as afterthoughts

04

Secure Sustainable Financing

Blended finance, long-term investment, and operational sustainability

05

Drive African-Led Innovation

Skills, research, digital systems, AI governance, and youth leadership

06

Strengthen Continental Collaboration

Regional cooperation, shared governance, Agenda 2063 alignment

Toward a Water-Secure and Resilient Africa

"Our vision is a water-secure and resilient Africa with safe sanitation for all. It is thus our commitment to develop "the capacity to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability" (UN Water, 2013).