

AFRICAN UNION

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UMOJA WA AFRIKA



UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

UNIÓN AFRICANA

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia P. O. Box 3243 Telephone: +251 115 517 700 Fax: +251 115 517 844
Website: www.au.int

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CONCEPT NOTE FOR THE 2026 AFRICAN UNION THEME ON
“Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to
Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063”

Article I. SUMMARY

1. Towards implementation of Decision Assembly/AU/Dec.912(XXXVIII), the Directorate of Sustainable Environment and the Blue Economy (SEBE) is coordinating the preparations and implementation of the action framework of the 2026 African Union theme on “**Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063**”.
2. The business of the Union to commemorate the theme will be launched at the 39th Ordinary Session of the Assembly in February 2026. The Summit will set the stage for consideration and adoption of the Africa Water Vision 2026 and Policy that will provide a strategic framework towards inclusive and climate resilient water security on the continent.
3. The action framework sets the strategic direction from the perspective of catalysing transformational change to recommend policy, programme and institutional interventions that include:
 - a. Building on the foundations of integrated water resources management to **bolster cooperation on water management** within the Water, Energy, Food and Ecosystems (WEFE) nexus framework.
 - b. Promoting **a new narrative on water** that fosters an appreciation of the vitality of water in economic growth; job creation; and industrialisation. This is especially given that, in Africa:
 - i. three out of four jobs are water-dependent;
 - ii. up to 80% of ailments impacting on the productivity of the labour force in Africa can be attributed to poor hygiene and sanitation;
 - iii. water scarcity and supply disruptions limit economic growth and, in turn, jobs;
 - iv. water scarcity, exacerbated by climate change, is a contributing factor to migration; and,
 - v. the transition to a greener economy enhances opportunities for decent jobs Programme (AUC, AMCOW, AfDB, GWP, 2019; Mbaziira, 2020).
 - c. Strengthening the **business case for water investments** in Africa to enhance human and institutional capacities, build infrastructure and improve information systems to support water management. In order to achieve rapid, sustained growth in a climate change context, strategic partnerships for water infrastructure development; institutional strengthening; and political leadership are urgently required. Coupled with measures to assure inclusivity of the vulnerable – especially women and youth, resilience to the shocks caused by climate risks will be enhanced.
 - d. Innovating mechanisms to **manage demand and improve efficiency** in the production, supply and utilisation of water in agriculture. The need is not only to increase productivity, but also to assure resilience of the sector to anticipated limitations to water availability due to climate uncertainties. Mechanisms are required to empirically monitor agricultural water extraction in Africa. This is a key first step to providing targeted, evidence-based – and therefore impactful – incentives to improve agricultural water use efficiency and productivity. Reducing,

reusing and recycling of water used in agriculture are vital elements of sustainably and ecologically increasing agricultural production at all levels.

4. To ensure sustainable water availability and safe sanitation for economic growth, social transformation, the action framework focusses on governance systems and management structures.

Article II. Background: the water, energy, agriculture and poverty dynamic water

5. Africa's aspirations for economic growth; social transformation; regional integration; trade; peace and security are dependent on assuring sustainable water availability for all purposes.

6. Water and sanitation play an important role in the pursuit of Africa's development aspirations given their direct bearing on all basic social and economic indicators. Every sector in any economy is influenced by water. Direct use of water in the extraction and production sectors results in demand for such services as finance, insurance, real estate, public administration, ICT, transportation, and trade. Economic activity in the primary and services sectors creates jobs, labour productivity, prosperity, wellbeing, peace and security. It, therefore, follows that effectiveness of both water management and water, sanitation and hygiene services provision should benefit economic growth and social transformation. In essence, success in assuring water security is a key influencing factor on the performance of the other sectors of the economy.

7. The African Water and Sanitation Sector Monitoring (WASSMO) System was thus established to track Africa's progress on implementing continental and global commitments on water and sanitation. These include the Africa Water Vision 2025; the Ngor Commitments on sanitation and hygiene; and SDG6. Information generated from Member States' self-assessments is used to provide a useful reality check on the prospects of realising Africa's development agenda. As a decision support tool, the system provides invaluable evidence-based policy formulation, implementation, and advisory support. It serves a vital 'barometer function' to the decision-making processes of the AU Assembly of the Heads of State and Government. Indeed:

- a. Limited progress on ensuring equitable availability of water for all purposes and sanitation for all is an indicator of constraints to economic production and labour productivity.
- b. Underdevelopment of water infrastructure translates into inadequate resilience to climate, health and food system shocks; as well compromised capabilities to mitigate water related disaster risks.
- c. Challenges of ineffective water governance systems and management structures allude to missed opportunities to release water's full socio-economic development potential.

Article III. Context: Water for Africa's economic growth and social transformation: a situation analysis

8. The political agenda of the Member States of the African Union is currently dominated by the urgent need to industrialise as a first step to alleviating persistent poverty¹. The ambition is to:

- a. build robust, competitive and climate resilient economies;
- b. accelerate employment and labour productivity growth; and, as a result,
- c. deliver inclusive socio-economic development and livelihoods improvement.

9. Achievement of this ambition is premised on planning, developing, utilising and managing Africa's natural resources base² (AUC, UNECA, AfDB, 2000; AUC, AMCOW, AfDB, GWP, 2019) to actualise both the African Union's Vision of:

- a. "*an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena*"; and,

10. The Africa Water Vision 2025 of:

- a. "*an Africa where there is an equitable and sustainable use and management of water resources for poverty alleviation, socio-economic development, regional cooperation and the environment.*"

11. A number of continental policy decisions and declarations have been taken by the African Union (AU) and AMCOW to foster actualisation of these visions. These include:

- a. the **African Union Agenda 2063, "the Africa We Want"**: Agenda 2063 provides the framework and roadmap to achieve the African Union Vision by 2063 through assuring self-reliance, regional integration, industrialisation and enhanced partnerships. The aspirations are elaborated in **Table 1** below.
- b. the **2014 Malabo Declaration [Assembly/AU/2(XXIII)]** on accelerated agricultural growth and transformation for shared prosperity and improved livelihoods. Through this declaration, the HoSG:
 - i. recommitted to the principles and values of the **Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP)** process;
 - ii. committed to enhancing investment finance in agriculture;
 - iii. committed to ending hunger in Africa by 2025;
 - iv. committed to halving poverty by the year 2025 through inclusive agricultural growth and transformation;
 - v. committed to boosting intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services;
 - vi. committed to enhancing resilience of livelihoods and production systems to climate variability and other related risks;
 - vii. committed to mutual accountability to actions and results; and,

¹ Whereas most recent estimates show that the share of the African population living on \$1.90 a day or less did decline from 56% in 1990, it was still at 30% in 2022 (Beegle, Christiaensen, Dabalen, & Gaddis, 2016; Galal, 2023).

² The natural resources base is the source of water and most of the potential wealth of countries, but is easily degraded if it is not protected and managed sustainably. This comprises of wildlife; natural vegetation (grasslands, forests, wetlands, scrubland); land (including soils); water (groundwater, streams, rivers, lakes, waterfalls); and minerals.

- viii. undertook to strengthen the African Union Commission to support delivery on the above commitments (AUC, 2014).
- ix. the **2010 Maputo Declaration (AU/MIN/Energy/Decl.)** that resolved to – among others – “*promot[e] cross-border river basins development and regional electric energy production and exchange networks*” and to request AUC to “*mobilise the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Member States to participate actively in the conduct of the study on the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) and to spare no effort to ensure implementation of the policies and programmes deriving therefrom*”.
- c. the **2008 Sharm El-Sheikh Declaration (Assembly/AU/Decl.1(XI))** on the Heads of State and Government’s Commitments for Accelerating the achievement of Water and Sanitation Goals in Africa, Eleventh Ordinary Session, 30 June – 1 July 2008, Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt;
- d. the **2008 Tunis Ministerial Declaration** on Accelerating water security for Africa’s socio-economic development;
- e. the **2008 Sirte Declaration** on Water for Agriculture and Energy in Africa: the Challenges of Climate Change;
- f. the **2004 Sirte Declaration (Ex/Assembly/AU/Decl. 1(II))** on the Challenges of implementing integrated and sustainable development of agriculture and water in Africa. Second Extraordinary Session, 27 February 2004. Sirte, Libya; and,
- g. the **2003 Maputo Declaration [Assembly/AU/Decl. 7(II)]** of the AU Heads of State and Government (HoSG) on achieving agriculture and food security in Africa. The HoSG committed to:
- i. “implement ... ***the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)*** ... and evolving Action Plans for agricultural development, at the national, regional and continental levels;
 - ii. ... adopt sound policies for agricultural and rural development; and,
 - iii. ... allocate at least 10% of national budgetary resources to [agriculture and rural development policy] implementation” (AUC, 2003).

Table 1: The seven aspirations, goals and priority areas of Agenda 2063

Aspiration	Goals	Priority Areas
Aspiration 1: A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.	(1) A high standard of living, quality of life and wellbeing for all citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incomes, jobs and decent work • Poverty, inequality and hunger • Social security and protection including persons with disabilities • Modern and liveable habitats and basic quality services
	(2) Well educated citizens and skills revolution underpinned by science, technology and innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and STI skills driven revolution
	(3) Healthy and well-nourished citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and nutrition

Aspiration	Goals	Priority Areas
	(4) Transformed economies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable and inclusive economic growth • STI driven manufacturing / industrialization and value addition • Economic diversification and resilience • Hospitality/tourism
	(5) Modern agriculture for increased productivity and production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural productivity and production
	(6) Blue/ ocean economy for accelerated economic growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marine resources and energy • Ports operations and marine transport
	(7) Environmentally sustainable and climate resilient economies and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable natural resource management and biodiversity conservation • Sustainable consumption and production patterns • Water security • Climate resilience and natural disasters preparedness and prevention • Renewable energy
Aspiration 2: An integrated continent; politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance.	(8) United Africa (federal or confederate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framework and institutions for a united Africa
	(9) Continental financial and monetary institutions are established and functional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial and monetary institutions
	(10) World class infrastructure criss-crosses Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications and infrastructure connectivity
Aspiration 3: An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law.	(11) Democratic values, practices, universal principles of human rights, justice and the rule of law entrenched	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democracy and good governance • Human rights, justice and the rule of law
	(12) Capable institutions and transformative leadership in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutions and leadership • Participatory development and local governance
Aspiration 4: A peaceful and secure Africa.	(13) Peace security and stability is preserved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance and preservation of peace and security
	(14) A stable and peaceful Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional structure for au instruments on peace and security
	(15) A fully functional and operational APSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully operational and functional APSA pillars
Aspiration 5: An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics.	16) African cultural renaissance is pre- eminent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values and ideals of pan Africanism • Cultural values and African renaissance • Cultural heritage, creative arts and businesses
Aspiration 6: An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African	(17) Full gender equality in all spheres of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women and girls' empowerment • Violence & discrimination against women and girls

Aspiration	Goals	Priority Areas
people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.	(18) Engaged and empowered youth and children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth empowerment and children
Aspiration 7: Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner.	(19) Africa as a major partner in global affairs and peaceful co-existence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Africa's place in global affairs. Partnership
	(20) Africa takes full responsibility for financing her development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> African capital market Fiscal system and public sector revenues Development assistance

Article IV. Initiatives to translate continental policy into action

12. Deriving their mandate from the policy framework in the foregoing, the mandated institutions are mobilising action for in-country implementation of the declarations. They have conducted various studies; and prepared plans and programmes to mobilise action and funding towards in-country implementation of – among others – the political commitments in the foregoing. Key among these initiatives have been:

- a. the ***Africa Food Crisis Response*** and the ***Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)*** to enhance access to agricultural water and irrigation, as well as improving rural infrastructure as part of activities to intensify agricultural production and productivity;
- b. the ***20-point Action Plan on Economic Growth*** through water and energy of the African Ministerial Conference on Hydropower and Sustainable development that focussed on planning and construction of water infrastructure, including 130 dams, to support Africa's growth aspirations. In collaboration with the AfDB, a target was set to increase Africa's water storage capacity by at least 8.5km³ in the period 2008 - 2013;
- c. ***Regional Strategic Action Plans*** for integrated water resources development and management in the SADC and ECOWAS regions; the ***World Hydrological Cycle Observing System (WHYCOS)*** project; and the ***Climate for Development Initiative for Africa (ClimDev-Africa)***, all developed with the overarching goal of improving day-to-day water management and, in turn, contributing to the delivery on the agenda of economic, social and environmental change;
- d. the ***Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA)***, the Priority Action Plan of which includes a number of transboundary water infrastructure projects; and,
- e. the ***African Water Resources Management Priority Action Programme 2016 - 2025 (WRM-PAP)*** of targeted interventions to achieve four broad goals, namely: i) ensuring water security in Africa; ii) enhancing resilience to climate change and water related disaster risks; iii) strengthening information systems for water resources monitoring and assessment; and iv) improving environmental integrity through wastewater and water quality management.

Article V. The vision for shared prosperity and improved livelihoods

13. In 2015, the African Development Bank's (AfDB) High Five Priorities (see Figure 1 below) were outed as a game changer in Africa's development discourse. They constitute the pillars of the vision of shared prosperity and improved livelihoods that is in turn premised on an ambitious development mandate that includes:

- a. the United Nations agenda on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for eliminating extreme poverty from the planet by 2030;
- b. the Paris Agreement on Climate Change;
- c. the African Union Agenda 2063.

14. Actualising this vision will require broadening access to economic opportunities for more people, countries and regions, and helping the continent generate much needed productive jobs, while protecting the vulnerable.

15. Helping the continent transition to green growth will require mainstreaming sustainable development initiatives through investments in clean renewable energy, climate smart agriculture and sustainable water resource management, among others.



Figure 1: The AfDB High Five Priorities for Africa

16. Economic models generated for the High Five Priorities indicate that:

- a. investments in agriculture will impact poverty reduction in Africa at a rate at least four times faster than comparable investments in any other sector (AfDB, 2015, 2016); and,
- b. agriculturally driven growth generates a larger welfare effect than non-agriculturally driven growth, especially for the poorest 20% of the population (Pingali et al., 2014; WB, 2007).

17. In 2022, around 431 million people in Africa were living in extreme poverty, with the poverty threshold at 1.90 U.S. dollars a day (Galal, 2023). Nearly 93% of these are farmers that are overrepresented in rural areas, which are less favoured for both environmental and economic reasons across the continent (Crespo Cuaresma et al., 2018; World Data Lab, 2020).

18. It is against this backdrop that the political consensus is that facilitating agricultural growth should be the backbone of efforts to fight poverty in Africa.

19. Agricultural transformation to spur productivity growth thus underlies strategic approaches to achieve the commitments of the Malabo Declaration, particularly to:

- a. end hunger in Africa by 2025;
- b. halve, by 2025, the level of poverty reported in 2014 through inclusive agricultural growth and transformation
- c. boost intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services; and,
- d. enhance resilience of livelihoods and production systems to climate variability and other related risks.

20. It is worth noting that water use in the agricultural sector was reported as 275 km³, in 2016, accounting for about 73.4% of the total water withdrawals in Africa (AMCOW, 2016). Increasing agricultural water productivity; and increasing the size of the area under irrigation in Africa are key success factors agricultural growth and, in turn, the fight against poverty. A key entry point is to strengthen water governance systems and management structures.

21. Hence the focus of the action framework for the 2026 theme of the African Union on ***“Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063”***.

Article VI. Water development priorities vis-à-vis the challenges to Africa’s growth aspirations

22. Pressure on Africa’s water resources is rising to unprecedented levels due to population growth, rapid urbanisation and economic development. Information available from AMCOW’s Water and Sanitation Sector Monitoring System (WASSMO) indicates that:

- a. Africa's population of 1.5 billion in 2024 is projected to reach 2.5 billion people by 2050 and 3.2 billion by 2070. At the very minimum, food production would need to almost double to feed that growing population. Our aspirations for modern economies and social progress as espoused by the AU Agenda 2063, will require a tenfold increase in water just for energy production.

- b. Rapid urbanisation and industrialisation will both increase the water demand and, on the basis of current trends in sanitation services provision, increase environmental degradation and the pollution of water bodies.
- c. The impacts of climate change are expected to result in a general change in the form, intensity and timing of water demand; affect water availability; and increase the risk of water-related hazards such as floods and droughts.
- d. The result are higher requirements for water for food and energy, which are exacerbated by environmental degradation; and the impacts of climate change. This in turn, has grave implications for assuring water security in Africa.
- e. Similarly, the need cannot be overemphasised to mobilise adequate sector capacity – in terms of management arrangements, administrative measures, economic incentives, budgetary resources and instruments – to adjust to water scarcity and prepare for the adverse impacts of climate change.

23. In addition, it is important to highlight the challenges to the attainment of sustainable development by Africa's Small Island Developing States (SIDS). SIDS face high risks due to their exposure to both environmental disasters and global environmental issues³.

- a. Many SIDS are faced with rising sea levels and coastal erosion, which threatens their territorial integrity and, in some cases, their very existence. A single natural disaster could – due to its disproportionate impact relative to SIDS' national capacities – destroy vital infrastructure, displace a significant number of the national population or impact on a nation's sustainable economic growth trajectory.
- b. Climate change is a risk multiplier: exacerbating existing security and development challenges.
- c. Rising sea levels, dying coral reefs and the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters exacerbate the conditions leading to community displacement and migration. They also threaten to increase tensions over resources and affect domestic and regional stability.
- d. SIDS are faced with the challenge of energy insecurity caused by dependence on expensive fossil fuels. Up to a third of the total import bill of SIDS is the cost of oil for electricity: on average 10% per cent of their GDPs!
- e. The size of the SIDS also contributes to their vulnerabilities. Often with Exclusive Economic Zones larger than their land areas, SIDS face the challenge of managing fisheries and preventing illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, which undermines economies and contributes to insecurity. Indeed, their size and capacity limitations make them a target for transnational criminal networks, including those involved in piracy or the smuggling of people, among others.

24. Furthermore, migration within Africa and across the Mediterranean to southern Europe has reached crisis levels. This is in part due to political instability in some parts of Africa. It is also due to general lack of economic opportunities and poor service delivery at the local level.

Article VII. The response: Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063.

³ Source: Excerpts adapted from the United Nations Security Council Open Debate 30 July 2015: Peace and Security Challenges Facing Small Island Developing States

25. The unifying factor for all the challenges and opportunities in the foregoing are Africa's water and related resources.

26. Governments, societies and the private sector need to take deliberate action to change the way we use and manage water to achieve the African Union's Vision of: ***"an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in global arena."***

27. In order to achieve rapid, sustained growth in a climate change context:

- a. Member States must urgently put in place water infrastructure and institutional measures to enhance resilience to the shocks caused by climate risks;
- b. vulnerable people, especially women and youth, need social, environmental and development systems which are resilient to climate change;
- c. resilient systems will support and sustain Africa's growth leading to improved livelihoods and sustainable growth. This is particularly vital for SIDS where building resilience is integral to deriving full benefit from their often-limited resource base.

28. Advancing social inclusion and, particularly, empowering women and girls is critical for effectively reducing poverty; sustaining growth; and building a peaceful, and prosperous Africa. This directly applies to the pursuit of the goals of Agenda 2063 through creating jobs; promoting industrialisation; and unlocking climate-resilient development. Purposefully inclusive approaches vis-à-vis roles and responsibilities in managing water and related resources are an essential ingredient to achieve Africa's full development potential.

29. The time to act; to expand economic opportunities; and to create jobs is now.

Article VIII. The Action Framework of the AU Theme on Water and Sanitation

30. For the AU theme on water and sanitation in 2026, focus is on developing and operationalising delivery mechanisms at a scale required to assure water, food and energy security for the people of Africa. Necessary entry points include:

- a. first, ***aligning the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy to the African Union Agenda 2063 and making the principles of valuing water the backbone of the action framework for financing its actualisation.***
 - i. The 39th Ordinary session of the AU Assembly in 2026 will consider the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy (AWVP63) for endorsement as a continental implementation framework of Agenda 2063. A key lesson learnt in our efforts to actualise the vision of an Africa where there is equitable utilisation of our water resources for socio-economic development, is that we need to inject new approaches into our strategies to attract commensurate financial resources to the sector.
 - ii. A paradigm shift is required to highlight the economic contribution of water to all productive sectors, as well as its contribution to livelihoods improvement; regional trade and integration; peace and security.
 - iii. The principles of valuing water hold promise for delivering on this commitment.
 - iv. Mobilising the buy-in of our political leadership will translate that promise into reality.

b. second, investing in institutional and human capacity development focusing on integrated information systems to support science-based decision making for climate resilience in the water and sanitation sector.

- i. Impact-oriented decision making must be data-driven with technological systems to support this and improved efficiency through integration of different functions. Hence their prioritisation in the action framework for implementing the theme on water and sanitation.
- ii. Credible and legitimised water information systems offer opportunities for a shared understanding of issues and, therefore, provide the bases for building trust.
- iii. At the same time, it must also be recognised that efficient water data management at all levels is a political issue. Information being power, an enabling environment to share it freely to build trust is a pre-requisite to realise efficiency in water information management.
- iv. This makes it incumbent to build very strong and capable intermediary institutions to strengthen information management systems.

31. In this respect, ongoing and planned interventions have strategically been prioritised as highlighted in the sections that follow.

32. Promoting a new narrative: “Investing in Water is investing in Jobs”

- a. Africa's economic growth is challenged and highly vulnerable to water availability, commodity prices and weather patterns (AUC, AMCOW, AfDB, GWP, 2019). The two examples on Zambia and Ghana in the text boxes illustrate this.

The Republic of Zambia, like much of the Southern Africa region, is experiencing a severe drought with major implications on the economy due to low water levels at Kariba Dam on the Zambezi River and other significant water bodies. On 24 December 2024, water levels had dropped to 2.34% of usable storage for hydropower generation from 11.83% recorded on the same date in 2023.

With 84% of Zambia's electricity generation from hydropower, low dam water levels result in energy deficits. Power rationing and water scarcity have had a profound negative impact on economic production, leading to job losses, decreased revenue collection and other negative effects on the country's productive sectors, particularly mining and manufacturing.

The majority of households and small-scale businesses are enduring power rationing for as long as 17 hours a day. In addition, an estimated 9.8 million people have been affected by the drought out of which 6.6 million require immediate provision of life-saving and early recovery assistance. To avert an impending economic and political crisis, the Zambian government has advanced US \$30million to the Public Power Utility for emergency power imports in 2024 alone.

Of great concern is that despite the evidence of low water levels precipitating energy deficits, the crisis is widely reported by senior government officials and the media as an energy crisis rather than a water crisis. *Source: Ministry of Water Development and Sanitation, GRZ, 2024*

In 2011, Ghana's economy grew at 14% with the onset of its first production of oil (GSS, 2012). However, in 2015 the growth rate was expected to be only 3.9% (Okudzeto, Mariki, Senu, & Lal, 2015). This can be attributed to a great extent to the failure to provide the basic water and energy infrastructure to meet the needs of a rapidly growing economy. Ghana is mainly dependent on the Akosombo hydroelectric dam on the Volta River for electricity. Due to reduced inflows from low rainfall, the hydroelectric dam was operating merely at half of its capacity in 2015 (The Africa Report, 2015). This was exacerbated by disruptions mainly in geothermal plants. In June 2015, all electricity was being rationed at 12 hours on, and 24 hours off. Though this is extreme, it reinforces the need for water infrastructure to sustain production and jobs in the nascent African economies. Anecdotal evidence from Trade Unions and Employers in Ghana indicate that tens of thousands of stable jobs were lost in 2015, the investment climate turned sour, forcing Ghana to seek IMF macro-economic bailout.

Source: The United Nations World Water Development Report 2016

- b. A new narrative on water that recognises the full potential of water in the economy is thus urgently required to further Africa's future development needs. This is especially given that:
- i. three out of four jobs are water-dependent;
 - ii. up to 80% of ailments impacting on the productivity of the labour force in Africa can be attributed to poor hygiene and sanitation;
 - iii. water scarcity and supply disruptions limit economic growth and, in turn, jobs;
 - iv. water scarcity, exacerbated by climate change, is a contributing factor to migration; and,
 - v. the transition to a greener economy enhances opportunities for decent jobs (AUC, AMCOW, AfDB, GWP, 2019; Mbaziira, 2020).
- c. The new narrative on water should foster an appreciation of the vitality of water in economic growth; job creation; and industrialisation. It should also raise the business case and profile of water in national and regional development. Indeed, aggressive efforts are required to:
- i. position water better in the economy;
 - ii. accelerate the pace of water infrastructure investments;
 - iii. increase awareness of water's critical role in enhancing job creation; and,
 - iv. build on the foundations of integrated water resources management to advocate for approaches such as the water-energy-food-ecosystem nexus.

33. Strengthening the business case for water investments in Africa

- a. Africa's sustainable development largely depends on goods and services derived from its environment and natural resources. As Africa pursues rapid and sustainable growth pathways via structural transformation, the management of natural capital, especially water resources, is critical. Water is at the core of Sustainable Development Goals given its vitality to nearly every aspect of sustainable generation of social, economic, financial and other wellbeing related benefits.
- b. There are challenges, though, facing AU Member States. With a rapidly growing population, by 2050 more than 60% of Africa's population will reside in urban areas. The population is young, with more than 40% below 15 years old in most countries: a large proportion of which is unemployed (AUC, 2014a). Migration within Africa and across the Mediterranean to southern Europe has reached crisis levels, in part, due to political instability in some parts of Africa, but also due to a general lack of economic opportunities (AUC, AMCOW, AfDB, GWP, 2019).
- c. Over the last decade, Africa has recorded sustained and impressive economic growth on the back of rising commodity prices. A dip in commodity prices during 2015 combined with droughts in the Horn of Africa and part of southern Africa, revealed structural challenges in African economies with most economies not diversified and heavily dependent on mineral resources. Most countries now face fiscal challenges with mounting debts and low absorption capacity. Although one quarter of the countries grew an average of about 7% or more, and some were among the fastest-growing countries in the world, future sustained growth will need to be diversified and inclusive, building on Africa's natural capital endowments especially agriculture – the largest employer on the continent (AfDB, 2018). The limiting factor is undeniably water insecurity, exacerbated by complex hydrology and climate change.
- d. The economies of many countries in Africa are extremely vulnerable to climate variability and climate change as they are largely based on natural resources (water, land, energy, forests/ecosystems). Lack of investments to enhance human and institutional capacities, build infrastructure and improve information systems to support water management exacerbate the difficulties. Only 15 – 30% of Africa's hydropower potential is tapped (AMCOW, 2016). Neither is the huge irrigation potential in its 64 shared river basins being harnessed to assure food and nutritional security.
- e. Concerted efforts are required for African SIDS to combat climate change; promote sustainable development; and address their environmental and natural resources related vulnerabilities.
- f. In order to achieve rapid, sustained growth in a climate change context, strategic partnerships for water infrastructure development; institutional strengthening; and political leadership are urgently required. Coupled with measures to assure inclusivity of the vulnerable, especially women and youth, resilience to the shocks caused by climate risks will be enhanced. And nowhere more so than in Africa's SIDS where building resilience is integral to deriving full benefit from their often-

limited resource base. In turn, climate resilient development will lead to sustainable growth and improved livelihoods.

- g. To achieve the SDGs, it is imperative for African Union and AMCOW to champion a paradigm shift in the approach to developing, utilising and managing Africa's water and related resources. The urgency and need for governments, societies and the private sector to fully embrace the concept of environmental security cannot be overemphasised. (Mbaziira, 2020, pp. 6-16)

34. Re-examining water, development, the economy and society: the development of water as a means-to-an-end

- a. Recent advances in the appreciation of the principles of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) have necessitated broadening the perspective to an outcome-oriented notion of:
 - i. harnessing water's productive potential;
 - ii. mitigating its destructive risks;
 - iii. improving the sustainability of the natural resources base; and, thus,
 - iv. spurring national and regional development as a whole.
- b. This is confirmed by the findings of the Africa Water and Sanitation Sector Reports; and the 2012 and 2018 editions of the AU/AMCOW Status Report on the Application of Integrated Approaches to Water Resources Management in Africa. They indicate significant improvements in – on the one hand – the Member States' internalisation and involvement in the implementation of international and regional policies and strategies; and – on the other hand – the application at a national level of generally accepted principles of effective water resources development, management and utilisation. An urgent need, though, is highlighted for targeted interventions to overcome particular challenges in mobilising the investment required to meet the targets of the Africa Water Vision 2025 for:
 - i. water productivity in industry, irrigated agriculture, energy, tourism and transport;
 - ii. conservation and restoration of environments; and
 - iii. developing appropriate tools and indicators for measuring the contribution of water to development, and thus provide a basis for highlighting the pivotal role of water resources as an essential ingredient in the advent of a green economy and sustainable development in Africa.
- c. In this respect, water infrastructure development should be advocated for and promoted as a means to provide a service – which is water – to the economy in order to enable growth and development to happen. Water sector interventions, especially for such resource management functions as water storage and flood control, should not be designed and marketed from the perspective of 'water sector development'. Rather, the approach to packaging them for investment should be centred on their eventual utility – from an economic perspective – in terms of providing water for food and energy production. This is to make use of the synergies between these three sectors optimising efforts towards water, food and energy security. This should be extended to the opportunities for employment and wealth creation: not to mention peace, social security and political stability.

35. Promoting the application of the UN High Level Panel on Water Principles on Valuing Water

- a. Strategies to improve the investment outlook for water and related resources development will also benefit from the application of the High Level Panel on Water (HLPW) principles for valuing water. The principles provide a guideline for determining the real value of proposed investments; the associated costs; and the benefits that can be expected. In essence, they serve the purpose of improving the appreciation of the economics of water in a country, river basin or region. A summary of the Panel’s headline recommendations is provided in Annex 1.
- b. The HPLW Principles on valuing water are summarised in the table below:

Table 2: HLPW Principles on valuing water

Headline Recommendation	Use the <i>HLPW Principles on Valuing Water</i> to sustainably, efficiently and inclusively allocate and manage water resources, and to deliver and price water services accordingly.
Detailed Recommendations	Apply the “HLPW Principles on Valuing Water” in order to recognise the various values that societies accord to water and its uses, take these into account in political and business decisions, and in decisions to price water and sanitation services appropriately.
	Conduct all processes to reconcile values in ways that are equitable, transparent, and inclusive, and value, manage, and protect all sources of water, including watersheds, rivers, aquifers, associated ecosystems, and used water flows for current and future generations.
	Promote education and public awareness about the intrinsic value of water and its essential role in all aspects of life and ensure adequate investment in institutions, infrastructure, information, and innovation to realize the many different benefits derived from water and reduce risks.
Principles for valuing water	
Recognise and Embrace Water’s Multiple Values	Identify and take into account the multiple and diverse values of water to different groups and interests in all decisions affecting water.
Reconcile Values and Build Trust	Conduct all processes to reconcile values in ways that are equitable, transparent, and inclusive.
Protect the Sources	Value, manage, and protect all sources of water, including watersheds, rivers, aquifers, associated ecosystems, and used water flows for current and future generations.
Educate to Empower	Promote education and public awareness about the intrinsic value of water and its essential role in all aspects of life.
Invest and Innovate	Ensure adequate investment in institutions, infrastructure, information, and innovation to realise the many different benefits derived from water and reduce risks.

- c. The application of the above listed principles, together with targeted interventions to catalyse change, holds promise for responding to the three generally accepted bottlenecks in the delivery of sustainable solutions for assuring water for energy, food and environmental security in Africa, namely:
 - i. the need for investment guarantees for water management, the fundamental aspects of which are not only a public responsibility, but also require 15 – 25 years for the tangible benefits to be realised;
 - ii. the need for effective transaction management to enable development planning to be effectively translated into both tangible infrastructure assets and related solutions, which will contribute to sustainable growth and prosperity for all; and,

- iii. the need for Member-States-led, integrated economic analyses to:
 - I. highlight the pivotal role of effective water management and adequate sanitation and related services provision in the economy; and,
 - II. where development is most urgently required to facilitate growth.

36. Investment-led transboundary management and governance of water and environmental resources

- a. The focus of transboundary water management in Africa has so far been on the application of the principles of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) planning at basin level to facilitate regional dialogues promoting transboundary and regional cooperation. Prominent examples of such interventions include:
 - i. the 2011 – 2013 and 2014 – 2016 AMCOW Work Programmes, as well as the AMCOW Strategy 2018 – 2030;
 - ii. the ANBO project on “Strengthening of Institutions for Transboundary Waters in Africa (SITWA)”;
 - iii. the work of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and River and Lake Basin Organisations (R/LBOs) to strengthen institutional capacities for IWRM planning.
- b. The cooperation and governance arrangements that have been born of these initiatives form a firm foundation for the application of WEFE nexus perspectives to determine intersectoral trade-offs and implement solutions that optimise overall benefit. To consolidate the achievements to date of those interventions, focus must now shift to facilitating investment in strategic water management solutions with transboundary, if not regional, benefits. To this end, the African Water Resources Management Priority Action Programme 2016 – 2025 (WRM-PAP); and, the AMCOW Strategy 2018 – 2030 promote the following strategic initiatives:
 - i. Establishing economic accounting for water as a discipline to, among others, improve the financing and investment outlook for water resources management in Africa
 - I. The strategy was adopted by AU Member States as part of ongoing efforts to revitalise and inject new approaches into delivering on the commitments of the Sharm el-Sheikh declaration relating to financing transboundary cooperation. The aim is to make an economic case for:
 - a. better prioritisation of water resources management in domestic economic planning and financial allocation; and,
 - b. cross-sector financing/investment to assure viability of investments in water dependent productive sectors (municipal water supply, energy, agriculture, agri-processing, mining, tourism).
 - II. The concept and framework of economic accounting for water, once institutionalised in Africa – and direct linkages made with the African Water and Sanitation Sector Monitoring and Reporting (WASSMO) System – has potential for a paradigm shift in the water sector financing policies through:
 - a. reforming regulations to promote efficiencies in current reporting arrangements;
 - b. identifying and quantifying water flows and their relationship with both climatic variables and economically valued inputs – if not limiting factors – to domestic supply, agriculture, industry, mining, energy production and various service industries;

- c. supporting strategic planning processes for use of land and related resources so that water resource utilisation and environmental conservation are optimised; and
 - d. providing instruments to support public and investor confidence in the amount of water being traded, extracted for consumptive use, recovered and managed for environmental and other public benefit outcomes.
- ii. *Improving national-level capacities for collecting complete and reliable hydro-meteorological and piezometrical data in all of Africa's 64 shared river basins*
- I. The success of plans to establish economic accounting for water as a framework for identifying, measuring, recording and reporting information about water in Africa depends to a large extent on the availability of reliable, complete and legitimised primary source data. Similarly, the African Water and Sanitation Sector Monitoring and Reporting System is designed to extract information from data in the custody of the Member States. Therefore, its functionality – as well as the utility and completeness of the information generated – depends on the availability at a national level of reliable hydrological, meteorological, piezometrical (groundwater), water quality and other resource monitoring data.
 - II. Information from the majority of Member States' departments and agencies responsible for the function of water resources monitoring and assessment points to inadequate gauging of both surface water basins and groundwater aquifers. This has highlighted a pressing and urgent need for support towards the efforts of Member States to establish and operate representative and reliable networks of hydro-meteorological, river gauging and water quality stations to monitor the state of the quantity and quality of the water resources in their territory.
 - III. The goal is to rehabilitate and expand national monitoring systems for water resources to meet the internationally accepted minimum, if not optimum, standards for collecting complete and reliable data and information. Also related to this, and taking into consideration the impacts – both ongoing and projected – of climate variability and climate change on the hydrological cycle, plans are underway to update and recalibrate the rating curves of many surface water resources gauging stations in Africa.
- iii. *Applying nexus perspective solutions to assure water, food and energy security in Africa*
- I. The WRM-PAP posits that water and energy resources are essential drivers of investments in land. This is highlighted by the fact that in Africa about 66% of large-scale foreign investments in land are directed to energy crops. Invariably all the foreign investments in land are subject to the availability of water. Large-scale foreign investments in land lead to changes in land use and, consequently, in hydrological fluxes through abstraction of water for irrigation and changes in the pattern of rainfall. The impacts go beyond the externalities on water resources and include severe changes in local livelihoods and surrounding ecosystems.
 - II. Adopting approaches informed by the nexus perspective is, therefore, emphasised as being important to:
 - a. ensure effectiveness and sustainability of government programmes, and,

- b. provide the private sector with safeguards to mitigate risks while seizing opportunities.
 - III. Water, energy and food security can only be achieved if the cross-sectoral interlinkages are taken into account. The nexus perspective is crucial to deal with trade-offs and identify synergetic solutions to pressing resource issues. Furthermore, investment and funding are needed to implement innovative solutions at large-scale.
 - IV. Responding to this additional demand in a manner that does not jeopardise immediate and long-term food security goals is still a challenge in several countries in Africa. It is in this regard that regional approaches are being undertaken to address trade-offs amongst water, energy and food security, as well as the implications to private and public investments. Focus has also been turned to capacity development activities relating to valuing ecosystem services, trade-offs and payment for ecosystem services at regional and sub-regional levels.
- iv. Improving agricultural water management
- I. The African Union's aspirations to increase nutrition levels while, at the same time, assuring food security for a rapidly growing population, translate into an exponential increase in the demands and pressures on Africa's water resources. None more pronounced than the demand to meet the required increases in agricultural production. Innovative mechanisms to manage demand and improve efficiency in the production, supply and utilisation of water in agriculture are therefore required.
 - II. The need is not only to increase productivity, but also to assure resilience of the sector to anticipated limitations to water availability due to climate uncertainties. This is in line with the Africa Water Vision 2025 target to increase the agricultural water productivity by 60% in the period 2000 to 2025, while at the same time doubling the area under irrigation.
 - III. Yet against such aspirations, monitoring of water use in the agriculture sector in Africa is largely based on estimates relying on secondary information sources. Mechanisms are required to empirically monitor agricultural water extraction in Africa as a first step to providing targeted, evidence-based – and therefore impactful – incentives to improve agricultural water use efficiency and productivity. Against a backdrop of:
 - a. agriculture accounting for over 73.4% of water withdrawals in Africa (AMCOW, 2016); as well as,
 - b. taking into consideration the chemical and fertiliser pollution potential of the agricultural water returned to the environment,
 - c. it goes without saying that improvements in agricultural water use and management are a critical factor in efforts to sustainably assure availability of freshwater resources for other sectors.
 - IV. Related interventions include:
 - a. promoting innovative mechanisms, at national level, to manage demand and improve efficiency in the production, supply and utilisation of water in agriculture to increase productivity, but also assure resilience of the sector to floods and droughts;
 - b. instituting mechanisms to facilitate the use of waste as a resource in agriculture at national level;

- c. turning the tide against the pollution of Africa's water and environmental resources, and,
 - d. sustainably and ecologically increasing agricultural production at all levels.
- v. Implementing the PIDA priority transboundary water and energy projects
 - I. As highlighted by the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), Africa has the lowest water storage capacity and irrigated agriculture in the world. In contrast:
 - a. an estimated 250 million people in Africa are currently exposed to increased water stress; and,
 - b. about half of the continent is either water stressed or facing water scarcity.
 - II. In contribution to the implementation of the water projects of the second phase of the PIDA Priority Action Plan (PAID-PAP II), planned interventions are aimed at:
 - a. advancing planned water storage infrastructure under PIDA; and
 - b. promoting and facilitating multifunctional "green" basin development centred on natural and built infrastructure to provide a continuum of water storage solutions.
 - III. Given the relatively lower investment requirements and higher probability of sustainability, natural options spanning household rainwater harvesting, ponds and tanks through to the utilisation of wetlands, lakes and natural or artificial groundwater recharge, among other methods are being promoted. Similarly, the development of multi-purpose reservoirs optimising the total benefit stream – water, food, energy, trade, ecosystems and disaster management – is vigorously promoted.
- vi. Enhancing use of wastewater and sludge, as appropriate and acceptable, for nutrient recovery in agriculture and bio-gas energy production
 - I. Experiences on planned reuse and the technologies applied to assure safety of effluent for return to the environment in AU Member States, including South Africa, Tunisia and Namibia, are being documented, promulgated and replicated. The activities are centred on:
 - a. instituting tariff systems targeted towards better cost recovery in wastewater collection and treatment, while at the same time safeguarding affordability;
 - b. facilitating safe use of wastewater in urban farming; and,
 - c. bio-gas energy production.
- vii. Other related initiatives
 - I. These include:
 - a. Standardising regulatory frameworks for agricultural water management across Africa.
 - b. Developing and adopting legal, policy and institutional frameworks for the collection and treatment of wastewater to a minimum water quality standard before discharge into transboundary water courses and aquifers.
 - c. Supporting Member States, R/LBOs and RECs to conduct water resources assessments – including assessing the availability of

groundwater resources and the impact of climate change on freshwater availability – as well as supporting them to monitor and manage groundwater use.

Article IX. Targeted outcomes

37. The expected outcomes are:
- a. An Africa Water Vision and Policy that provides a strategic framework towards inclusive and climate resilient water security on the continent beyond 2025.
 - b. Strengthened water and sanitation sector governance arrangements that contribute to improving the financing and investment outlook for assuring water availability for all purposes.
 - c. Political buy-in and consolidation of political commitment to raise the profile and value attached to water in national systems for economic planning and development.
 - d. Stronger interaction between water and other related sectors – agriculture, energy, climate change, peace and security – to harness the full potential of water in the economy.
 - e. Knowledge resources; and capacities of partnerships, institutions and stakeholders strengthened to support a paradigm shift in the policy environment and strategies for financing the water sector in Africa.

Article X. Funding and Implementation Arrangements

38. The implementation arrangements will consider the subsidiary principle and allow utilisation, as appropriate, of national as well as RECs' and/or RLBOs' systems. The African Union Commission (AUC), with support from the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW), will establish and coordinate a mechanism for providing technical support to the AU Member States and regional implementing partners. The AU's sovereign and non-sovereign partners, as well as the bilateral, funding and development partners supporting the water sector in Africa are encouraged to support the implementation of the action framework for the AU theme on water.

39. Existing procedures for implementing initiatives at national level in the water and sanitation sector shall be applied for executing all relevant activities in Member States. Coordination of the processes for implementing prioritised interventions of a transboundary/regional nature shall rely on the established mechanisms of the AUC, AMCOW, AUDA-NEPAD, RECs and R/LBOs.

40. Participatory approaches shall be applied to elaborate, as necessary, the individual intervention areas into aptly scaled programmes and/or projects, the implementation of which shall be managed through any one or more of the following arrangements:

- a. Streamlined interventions in national programmes for implementing water, food, energy and environment activities by the responsible ministries and/or departments;
- b. Bi- and multi-lateral programmes of development partners at Member States or regional level;
- c. Private sector involvement through direct investments and/or corporate social responsibility initiatives in support of programme coordination and community level activities; and,

- d. Social mobilisation for community-led action to assure both impact of interventions at a grassroots level and sustainability of outcomes.

Article XI. Financial Implications

41. Against the background of the foregoing, existing budgetary allocations to facilitate implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh Declaration; the AMCOW Work Programme; and the PIDA priority transboundary water projects will suffice for the financial year 2026. The supporting partners will mobilise own resources.

42. Detailed interventions; funding and implementation arrangements; as well as resources mobilisation strategies will be presented for the consideration of the Assembly at its 39th Ordinary Session in February 2026.

Article XII. Legal Implications

43. It is desired for all AU Member States to participate in the implementation of the action framework for the AU theme on water and sanitation in 2026. Indeed, no effort shall be spared to bring the benefits of the planned interventions to all AU Member States. The endorsement of the action framework, though, by the Assembly of the African Union is a non-binding expression of the Member States to raise the profile of water in Africa's ambitions for economic growth and social transformation. Nothing specified or referred to in the action framework is intended to be legally binding on the Member States, nor to create, evidence or imply any contract, obligation to enter into any agreement, or obligation to negotiate.

Article XIII. Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

44. Elaborate systems for gathering the required information to report on progress shall form integral elements of the governance and accountability arrangements at the various levels of implementation. As a first step, the collaborating partners will review and ensure broadening of the scope of the indicators of the African Water and Sanitation Sector Monitoring and Evaluation System to track implementation of the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy. As a result, progress to actualise the vision and policy shall be reported on within the framework of the Africa Water and Sanitation Sector Report to the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union.

Article XIV. Roadmap and Key Milestones

45. Table 3 below lists the key steps on the roadmap to formulate the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy, as well as the proposed activities of the action plan of the 2026 AU theme on water and sanitation.

Table 3: Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy formulation process and proposed activities of 2026 AU theme on water and sanitation

#	Activity and Objective	Target Completion Date
1.	38 th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly took decision Assembly/AU/Dec.912(XXXVIII) endorsing "Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063" as the AU theme for 2026.	Feb 2025

2.	Thematic papers prepared to guide regional consultations on the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy	Feb 2025
3.	<p>a. Subregional consultations with Member States, RECs, RLBOs and partners on regional inputs to inform drafting of the vision and policy</p> <p>b. Regional agreement on technical proposals of Vision and Policy informed by the 2024 Annual Report of the Commission on the implementation of the July 2008 Assembly Declaration on the Sharm El Sheikh Commitments for Accelerating the Achievement of Water and Sanitation Goals in Africa (Assembly/AU/ Decl.1 (XI)).</p> <p>c. Dates of the AMCOW sub-regional statutory meetings and consultations on the vision and policy</p> <p>i. 4-7 March; Eastern Africa in Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania</p> <p>ii. 18-20 March; Western Africa in Abuja, Federal Republic of Nigeria</p> <p>iii. 24-26 March – Southern Africa in Harare, Republic of Zimbabwe</p> <p>iv. 02 – 03 April – Central Africa, virtually</p> <p>v. 08 – 10 April – Northern Africa, in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco</p>	Mar - Apr 2025
4.	All inputs from consultations and dialogues synthesised into the discussion draft of the vision and policy document circulated to Member States	May 2025
5.	<p>3rd African Implementation and Partnership Conference on Water (PANAFCON-3), in Lusaka, Republic of Zambia</p> <p>a. Broad consultations reviewing the initial draft of the vision and policy;</p> <p>b. Consensus reached on vision and policy goals and announced in paragraph 10 of the PANAFCON-3 Communique</p>	27-29 May 2025
6.	Circulate 2 nd draft of the vision and policy document after incorporating inputs from PANAFCON-3	Wk 1 of July 2025
7.	Member States' comments and inputs to update the 2 nd draft of the vision and policy	Jul – Aug 2025
8.	<p>Circulate final draft of the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy and engaging of Member States at – subject to confirmation:</p> <p>a. AU Africa Water Investment Summit 2025, Cape Town, Republic of South Africa;</p> <p>b. AU Climate Summit, Addis Ababa, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia</p>	Aug 2025
9.	14 th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers Ministerial level consideration of draft final Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy for adoption	Sep 2025
10.	6 th Ordinary Session of the Specialised Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, Water and Environment (STC on ARBWE) Consideration of the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy and its action framework for transmission through the organs of the AU	Oct 2025
11.	39 th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly Consideration of the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy and its action framework by the AU Assembly within the framework of the action plan of the African Union theme for 2026 on: <i>“Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063”</i>	Feb 2026
12.	12 th Ordinary Session of the African Regional Forum for Sustainable Development on the theme: Water and Development	Apr 2026
13.	AU – AfDB Water Investment Summit 2026	May 2026 (TBC)
14.	10 th Africa Water Week	Oct 2026
15.	UN 2026 Water Conference co-chaired by Senegal <i>Ensure the vertical linkage between the action plans on AU theme on 2026 and the UN 2026 water conference</i>	Feb 2026
16.	Implementation of action plan on AU 2026 theme	Continuous

Article XV. Conclusion

46. The action framework for implementing the 2026 AU Theme on water and sanitation is dedicated to the vitality of investing in activities to assure water, food and energy security. It is recognised that environment and natural resources, particularly freshwater, are critical to the productivity of sectors such as energy, agriculture, industry and fisheries.

47. In this context, the emerging water sector development priorities can be summarised as presented in table 4 below.

Table 4: Summary of water sector development priorities from a WEFE nexus perspective

Priority for the water sector	WEFE nexus synergies and opportunities		
Water	Food	Energy	Environment
Strengthening the business case for water investments in Africa	Aspirations for increased agricultural production and productivity, espoused by the CAADP are dependent on commensurate and reliable water access. Its thus imperative that investments into land for agricultural production factor in water development.	Projections of an African population of 1.6 billion by 2030 translate into, at least, a tenfold increase in water needs for energy production to support modernisation of economies and social progress. Implementation of the PIDA water and energy projects is vital not only to increase energy production and access, but also to improve navigation and irrigation development.	Water investments are a precursor to environmental security and, in turn, climate resilient – and therefore – sustainable development
Application of the UN-HLPW Principles on Valuing Water	Create incentives for water users, including irrigated agriculture, to not waste or pollute water, and to promote its reuse	Prioritise investment in innovative development of energy infrastructure to serve multiple purposes including reducing water related disaster risks and economic shocks.	Value environmental contributions to water management; prevent degradation and pollution of watersheds, rivers, lakes and aquifers; and, where necessary, restore and maintain acceptable environmental conditions and water quality
A new narrative: “Investing in Water is investing in Jobs”	Utilise the water-energy-food-ecosystem nexus approach to: i) position water better in the economy; ii) accelerate the pace of water infrastructure investments; and, iii) increase awareness of water’s critical role in enhancing job creation; economic growth; and industrialisation.		
Development of water as a means-to-an-end	Pursuit of the Africa Water Vision targets of: i) realising, by 2025, at least 25% of the development potential of water for agriculture; hydropower; industry; tourism and transportation ii) putting in place and fully implementing mechanisms and measures for the conservation and restoration of environment, biodiversity, and life supporting ecosystems		
Investment-led transboundary management and governance of water and environmental resources	i) cross-sector financing/investment to assure viability of investments in water dependent productive sectors (municipal water supply, energy, agriculture, agri-processing, mining, tourism) ii) identifying and quantifying water flows and their relationship with both climatic variables and economically valued inputs – if not limiting factors – to domestic supply, agriculture, industry, mining, energy production and various service industries; iii) supporting strategic planning processes for use of land and related resources so that water resources utilisation and environmental conservation are optimised; and		

Priority for the water sector	WEFE nexus synergies and opportunities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iv) providing instruments to support public and investor confidence in the amount of water being traded, extracted for consumptive use, recovered and managed for environmental and other public benefit outcomes v) capacity development vis-à-vis valuing ecosystem services, trade-offs and payment for ecosystem services at regional and sub-regional levels vi) managing demand and improving efficiency in the production, supply and utilisation of water in agriculture – including use of waste as a resource in agriculture vii) promoting and facilitating multifunctional “green” basin development centred on natural and built infrastructure to provide a continuum of water storage solutions viii) instituting tariff systems targeted towards better cost recovery in wastewater collection and treatment, while at the same time safeguarding affordability; ix) facilitating safe use of wastewater in urban farming; and, x) bio-gas energy production.

48. It is evident in the foregoing that freshwater availability is critical to releasing Africa’s development potential, as well as sustaining economic growth and social transformation. It is a key determining factor in efforts to ensure food and energy security as well as for increasing industrial production. The quality of freshwater ecosystems has a direct impact on the wellbeing and productivity of the population and, by inference, on the sustainability of economic growth and development at a national level. The benefits of investing in improved water resources management and access to clean water and sanitation, therefore, remain clear and germane.

Article XVI. Recommendation

49. Going forward, the Assembly is requested to:
- a. endorse the action framework for the 2026 AU Theme on **“Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063”**. The framework is geared towards strengthening water security towards attainment of Africa’s aspirations to expand economic opportunities; and curtail the factors underlying unemployment, migration, displacement, regional and national security.
 - b. take note of the ongoing implementation of the roadmap to formulate an Africa Water Vision and Policy that will provide a strategic framework towards inclusive and climate resilient water security on the continent beyond 2025;
 - c. commend H E President Hakainde Hichilema of the Republic of Zambia for hosting, on 27 – 29 May 2025, the third African Implementation and Partnership Conference on Water (PANAFCON-3) in partial implementation of Decision Assembly/AU/Dec.931(XXXVIII),
 - d. additionally take note of the Communique of African Leaders at PANAFCON-3 on assuring inclusive and climate-resilient water security and sanitation for the Africa We Want, done on 29 May 2025, in Lusaka, Republic of Zambia;
 - e. request His Excellency President Hakainde Hichilema of the Republic of Zambia, supported by the leadership of the Sectoral Ministerial Committee on Water and Sanitation of the STC on ARBWE, to update the Assembly – at its 39th Ordinary Session in February 2026 – on the outcomes of the process to formulate the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy, including a report on PANAFCON-3;
 - f. task the AMCOW Secretariat and the Commission of the African Union, with support from partners, to coordinate a Member States-led participatory process to:
 - i. finalise the draft Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy, and its action framework;

- ii. submit it for consideration at the 14th Ordinary Session of the General Assembly of the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW);
- iii. submit, through the 6th Ordinary Session of the STC on ARBWE, the vision and policy – as will be vetted by the 14th General Assembly of AMCOW – for consideration at the 39th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union in February 2026; and,
- iv. additionally submit a detailed action plan for the theme of the African Union for 2026 highlighting processes to ensure an African Common Position on engaging at and contributing to the United Nations Water Conference of 2026 to speed up the implementation of SDG 6.

ANNEXES

Annex 1

The High-Level Panel on Water (HLPW)⁴ was co-convened in 2016 by the UN Secretary General and the World Bank President to provide the leadership required to tackle one of the world's most pressing challenges – an ever-growing water crisis. It identified ways in which the world could accelerate progress towards ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (SDG 6).

Text Box 1: HLPW headline recommendations

FOUNDATIONS FOR A WATER SAFE, SECURE, RESILIENT, SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE ACCESS WORLD	
Understand Water	Commit to making evidence-based decisions about water, and cooperate to strengthen water data, such as through the HLPW World Water Data Initiative
Value Water	Use the <i>HLPW Principles on Valuing Water</i> to recognize the values that societies accord to water and its uses, to shape how water is allocated, how water and sanitation services are priced, and how water resources are managed and sustained.
Manage Water	Implement integrated approaches to water management at local, national and transboundary levels, strengthen water governance, and ensure social inclusion.
LEADING AN INTEGRATED AGENDA AT THE LOCAL, COUNTRY AND REGIONAL LEVELS.	
Ensure Universal Access to Safe Water & Sanitation	Address gaps in service delivery models, technology and behaviour change which limit access to sustainable drinking water and sanitation for all – including the needs of women, girls, people with disabilities and communities in vulnerable situations.
Build Resilient Societies and Economies, Reducing Disaster Risk	Shift focus of disaster management from response to preparedness and resilience.
	Take action where water-related risks may exacerbate fragility, conflict, or migration.
	Create incentives for water users, including irrigators, to not waste or pollute water, and promote its reuse.
Increase Water Infrastructure Investment	Improve the enabling environment for investment in sustainable water-related infrastructure and services to attract the greatly increased levels of investment required.
Nurture Environmental Water	Value environmental contributions to water management, prevent degradation and pollution of watersheds, rivers, lakes and aquifers, and where necessary, restore and maintain acceptable environmental conditions and water quality.
Develop Sustainable Cities	Implement an integrated approach to urban water management in line with the Habitat III New Urban Agenda.
CATALYSING CHANGE, BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	
Promote Innovation	Support programs, such as the HLPW Water Innovation Engine, which foster the uptake of new water-related business models and technologies.
Strengthen Partnerships	Motivate all water use sectors to embrace water stewardship, strengthen their collaboration, and participate in integrated water resource management.
Increase Global Water Cooperation	Strengthen the UN-System's support to member states and its coordination of water matters, and use the UNGA <i>Water Action Decade</i> as a platform for exchanges of best practices and building partnerships, dedicating each year of the Water Action Decade to one of the above ten HLPW Action Areas.

Source: HLPW Outcome Document, March 2018

⁴ The HLPW membership comprised of 11 sitting Heads of State and Government from Australia, Bangladesh, Hungary, Jordan, South Africa, Mauritius (co-chair), Mexico (co-chair), Netherlands, Peru, Senegal and Tajikistan; and a Special Advisor.



COMMUNIQUE OF AFRICAN LEADERS AT THE

THIRD AFRICAN PARTNERSHIP AND IMPLEMENTATION CONFERENCE ON WATER ON ASSURING INCLUSIVE AND CLIMATE-RESILIENT WATER SECURITY AND SANITATION FOR THE AFRICA WE WANT

PREAMBLE

We, the Ministers in charge of Foreign Affairs, Environment, and Water and Sanitation in Africa, gathered for the third African Implementation and Partnership Conference on Water (PANAFCON-3) held on 27 – 29 May 2025 in Lusaka, Zambia; in the presence of other global leaders, Intergovernmental Organisations, Regional Economic Communities, United Nations Agencies, private sector, civil society organisations, indigenous peoples, local communities, farmer organisations, children, youth, women and academia:

1. **Recall** Assembly Decisions (Assembly/AU/Draft/Dec.31(XXXVIII)Rev.1) appreciating the Republic of Zambia's leadership to host PANAFCON-3 on 27 – 29 May 2025.
2. **Commend** H E Hakainde Hichilema, President of the Republic of Zambia, for guiding an inclusive multi-level dialogue during PANAFCON-3, to mobilise political ownership and public commitment to an Africa water vision and policy that:
 - 2.1 elevates water as a strategic economic and security asset;
 - 2.2 places emphasis on making a business case for the water and sanitation economy as an essential success factor of national fiscal policy; and,
 - 2.3 is aligned to and is adopted as an implementation framework of the African Union's Agenda 2063.
3. **Recognise** our shared responsibility under Aspiration 1 of Agenda 2063 of *"a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development"* – to motivate action to achieve goal 7 of *"environmentally sustainable and climate resilient economies and communities"* through assuring water security, among others.
4. **Reiterate** our commitment to accelerate the achievement of water and sanitation goals in Africa as encapsulated by, among others:
 - 4.1 the 2008 Sharm El-Sheikh Commitments for Accelerating the Achievement of Water and Sanitation Goals in Africa (Assembly/AU/Decl.1 (XI));
 - 4.2 the 2004 Sirte Declaration on the Challenges of Implementing Integrated and Sustainable Development on Agriculture and Water in Africa;
 - 4.3 the 2015 Ngor Declaration on sanitation and hygiene; and,
 - 4.4 the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
5. **Additionally recognise:**
 - 5.1 water as Africa's most strategic resource and foundation of our prosperity, resilience, dignity and unity and, therefore, **appreciate** that strengthening water security and sustainable sanitation is a prerequisite for economic growth and inclusive social transformation; and
 - 5.2 that Africa's youth represent a significant demographic, making Africa the continent with the youngest population in the world.
6. **Acknowledge:**
 - 6.1 the urgent need to raise the profile and value attached to water in national systems for economic planning and development, and to thus increase domestic allocations and investment into the water, sanitation and hygiene sub-sectors;
 - 6.2 the significant water investment gap across the continent; and the critical need to develop investment-ready water projects that can attract private sector investment, development finance and other sources of finance including climate finance;
 - 6.3 the upcoming AU-Africa Water Investment Summit scheduled for 13-15 August 2025 in Cape Town, South Africa as a critical follow-up platform to PANAFCON-3 towards concrete investment partnerships and financing arrangements for water projects.

7. **Commit** to strengthen existing continental monitoring and evaluation frameworks, including the African Water and Sanitation Sector Monitoring and Reporting System (WASSMO) and the PIDA⁵ Water scorecard⁶ for tracking progress made in the mobilisation of water investments for PIDA PAP 2.
8. **Motivated** to improve efficiency and efficacy of utilising available public financial resources, as well as expanding funding and investment opportunities by attracting the private sector; and,
9. **Underlining** the urgency of the need to act to expand economic opportunities and to create jobs, we **reaffirm** unwavering commitment to:
 - 9.1 harness water's productive potential;
 - 9.2 manage water-related disaster risks;
 - 9.3 enhance the sustainability and resilience of the natural resources base; and, thus,
 - 9.4 catalyse national and regional development underpinned by solidarity and innovation for peace and opportunity.
10. **WE undertake** to assure sustainable water availability and safe sanitation systems to achieve the goals of Agenda 2063 through the pursuit of policy goals to actualise the vision of an Africa where:
 - 10.1 there is universal access to safely managed water, sanitation and hygiene services, including in emergency situations;
 - 10.2 there is sustainable water availability for vibrant economies and growing, prosperous populations facing greater climate uncertainty;
 - 10.3 people, economies, and ecosystems are resilient and adequately protected from water-related disasters risks;
 - 10.4 good water governance systems, management institutions and transformative leadership are in place and grounded in international water law and the principles of subsidiarity, accountability and transparency;
 - 10.5 water basins are recognised as shared natural assets that drive peace, trade, regional integration, social inclusion and political stability;
 - 10.6 human capital development, technological empowerment and adaptive learning meet the requirements for effective management of Africa's natural resources base;
 - 10.7 there is investment into integrated water information systems supporting science-based decision making for climate resilience and raising the prioritisation of water management and sanitation in national systems for economic planning and financial allocation; and,
 - 10.8 a thriving blue economy sustainably leverages Africa's aquatic resources to drive prosperity, climate resilience, ecosystem health and well-being.
11. **AND, We affirm** our commitment to a Member States-led participatory process to:
 - 11.1 finalise the draft Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy, and its action framework;
 - 11.2 submit it for consideration at the 14th Ordinary Session of the General Assembly of the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW);
 - 11.3 seek its endorsement as a continental implementation framework of Agenda 2063 at the 39th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union in February 2026;
 - 11.4 present it as Africa's Common Position at the United Nations Water Conference of 2026 to speed up the implementation of SDG 6; and,
 - 11.5 launch implementation of the action frameworks of both the African Union Theme for 2026 and the UN 2026 Water Conference to put the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy at the centre-stage of global discussions on what needs to be done to add new impetus to the pursuit of Africa's commitments on water and sanitation.

⁵ Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA).

⁶ Decision Assembly/AU/Dec.818(XXXV) of February 2022 APPROVES the framework for tracking progress in the mobilisation of PIDA water investments, and DIRECTS AUDA-NEPAD to continue mobilising and establishing partnerships for PIDA implementation and report back bi-annually on the gaps and progress made in the mobilisation of water investments for PIDA PAP 2 using the PIDA Water scorecard as a reference.

The Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy shall be our compass, our voice, and our commitment to future generations.

REQUESTS the African Union Commission to present to the PRC a report on the situation on the status of Implementation of the Roadmap on the Theme of the Year 2026.

REQUESTS the African Union Commission to elaborate a Matrix on the Implementation of the decisions and declarations of the AU in line with Theme of the Year 2026 and to be annexed to the Concept Note and the Roadmap to be presented to the 39th AU Assembly in February 2026.

Done in Lusaka on 29 May 2025

Article XVII. Bibliography

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