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African Union Commission Calls for Re-Defining “Bankability” to Close Africa’s Water and Sanitation Financing Gap.



The African Union Commission has underlined the urgent need for a fundamental shift in how Africa values, finances, and invests in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). On the margins of the African Development Bank (AfDB) Annual Meetings, a high-level dialogue on financing the Africa Water Policy and Vision was held on 27 May in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo.

Speaking at the event, H.E. Moses Vilakati, Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment (ARBE), emphasized that the continent is at a defining moment — one that requires not only increased investment, but also a new approach to positioning water and sanitation within Africa’s broader development and economic transformation agenda.

Underscoring the political commitment of the continent’s leaders, Commissioner Vilakati noted that Africa is sending a strong political message to the world through the AU Theme of the Year 2026: “Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063.” He stated that Heads of State and Government have elevated water and sanitation to the highest political level across the continent, recognizing that water is a strategic economic asset and that sanitation is central to dignity, public health, human capital development, productivity, resilience, and sustainable development.

The Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy (AWVP2063) was officially launched in February 2026 on the margins of the 39th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa. AWVP2063 positions water as a critical enabler of Agenda 2063, supporting poverty eradication, food security, industrialization, climate resilience, and regional integration. Its overarching vision is “a water-secure and resilient Africa with safe sanitation for all.”



Emphasizing the need to redefine bankability, Commissioner Vilakati argued that Africa must re-examine how “bankability” is defined in the water sector. He stressed that the key question is not only whether investments generate immediate financial returns, but also what the cost to Africa will be if underinvestment in water

security and safe sanitation continues. He cited persistent challenges across the continent, noting that more than 400 million Africans lack access to basic drinking water, while nearly 700 million lack adequate sanitation and hygiene services. He further underlined the substantial financing gap, estimating that between USD 30 billion and USD 50 billion is required annually to achieve SDG 6 by 2030, while current annual investments remain significantly below this level. *(Read the full statement.)*
<https://au.int/en/speeches/20260527/commissioner-arbe-side-event-financing-africa-water-policy-and-vision>)

Delivering his opening remarks at the high-level dialogue, Dr. Martin Fregene, Vice President Agriculture, Human and Social Development at the Africa Development Bank (AfDB) highlighted that water is central to Africa’s broader development ambitions, supporting industrialization, agricultural transformation, energy systems, public health, economic productivity, and social stability. He noted that climate shocks, rapid urban expansion, and raising demand for food, energy, housing, and industry are intensifying the pressure on water systems across the continent.

Emphasizing the urgent need to finance and implement Africa’s water security agenda, Dr. Fregene pointed out that the principal challenge is not only funding, but also the investment readiness of projects, coordination, and institutional capacity needed to convert commitments into water security outcomes.

The Vice President, during the high-level event, also announced the launch of the African Water Facility’s latest strategy, reflecting a renewed determination to move from ambition to implementation. “The facility’s latest strategy will guide us to support more investment-ready projects, broaden financing partnerships, and support the development of a stronger pipeline of bankable water investments across the continent, he added.

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