

9th World Water Forum, Dakar 2022. Water Security for Peace and Development. Beyond Commitments, What Should Be Done?

Every three years, the World Water Council convenes an international forum to raise awareness on global water challenges. The 9th Water Forum will be held in Dakar, Senegal from 22 to 27 March 2022. The forum's aim is to raise awareness among economic, political and social decision makers in order to trigger action; facilitate dialogue and experience sharing on efforts to improve access to water and sanitation supply; and to create an environment for cooperation in the implementation of integrated concrete responses to issues in water.

As a faith-based entity of the Catholic Church for its pastoral mission of charity and; social and economic justice, Caritas Africa believes that access to safe and clean drinking water is indispensable for survival. Caritas echoes the words of Pope Francis that *"the world owes a significant social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity."* This policy brief examines the water crisis in sub-Saharan Africa, highlights some legal policy and planning frameworks, and pronounces the central role of faith communities in this agenda. The piece calls on decision makers to unlock financing to promote ecologically sound investments in water and sanitation facilities.

The Water and Sanitation Crisis in sub-Saharan Africa

Studies show that the sub-Saharan African countries are affected by the overuse of the existing water systems. Notably, water scarcity has led to the competition over shared natural resources and predisposes individuals to conflict and forced migration.¹ The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa report on SDG 5 (ECA/RFSD/2022/6) highlights a persisting and worrying trend on the impact of water scarcity among women and girls. Within the report, it is pointed out that women and girls are exposed to sexual violence when carrying out domestic tasks such as fetching water away from their homes. This labour-intensive role consumes time that would have ideally been used for education or other productive roles.

... One serious problem is the quality of water available to the poor. Every day, unsafe water results in many deaths and the spread of water-related diseases, including those caused by chemical substances...

Underground water sources in many places are threatened by the pollution produced in certain mining, farming and industrial activities, especially in countries lacking adequate regulation or controls...

(Pope Francis, Laudato Si Para 29)

¹ Water Stress in Sub-Saharan Africa <https://www.cfr.org/background/water-stress-sub-saharan-africa#:~:text=Sub%2DSaharan%20Africa%20suffers%20from%20chronically%20overburdened%20water%20systems%20under%20infrastructure%20only%20exacerbate%20the%20problem.>

Other studies have shown that sub-Saharan Africa accounts for one-fourth of the world's population of those defecating in the open.² This is a glaring health concern for the reason that human waste ends up transferred to nearby water resources and to the food that they consume. Furthermore, populations in sub-Saharan Africa by large rely on surface water,³ which is highly polluted and considered unreliable as a safe source of drinking water.

The water crisis in sub-Sahara Africa is intensified by the frequent flooding and droughts. Flooding contaminates water sources and droughts result to severe food insecurity. All the aforementioned issues also predispose millions of Africans to water-borne diseases. There is an urgent need to unlock financing to facilitate access to piped water obtained from clean sources.

Water Resources in Africa

Africa has plenty of water resources that are sourced from its seventeen major rivers and hundreds of lakes. Other sources include water tables and groundwater. All these resources are shared amongst several countries; resulting to strong sub-regional interdependence on water⁴. Water scarce areas are in places such as northern Kenya, Niger and Somalia, and water resources are plenty in countries such as Gabon and Sierra Leone.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Central region is endowed with 48% of Africa's water resources and the Gulf of Guinea holds 24% of the continent's water potential. On the other hand, the North African region is the most disadvantaged with less than 1% of renewable water resources.

African Legal Frameworks to address the Water and Sanitation Crisis in Africa

In 2016, 30 African water ministers adopted "*the Dar es Salaam Roadmap for achieving the N'gor Commitments on Water Security and Sanitation in Africa.*" This commitment provided a roadmap towards the attainment of Africa's water vision 2025. Within this commitment, the sector ministers observe that by increasing transparency and accountability, efficiency in service delivery would be attained. The roadmap in addition places emphasis on policy coherence in implementation while creating an enabling environment for civil society and citizen engagement in planning and monitoring. The ministers indicated that they were keen to integrate water, sanitation and climate in an effort to attain health and nutrition outcomes⁵.

African Commitments and Dialogue Forums on Water:

- Africa Water Vision 2025; Equitable and Sustainable Use of Water for Socioeconomic Development.
- Pan African Conference on Sanitation and Hygiene (Africa San) and eThekweni Declaration
- Africa Water Week and the Tunis Declaration
- The "*Sharm El-Sheikh Commitments to Accelerate Progress towards the Water and Sanitation Goals in Africa*" from the 11th session of the African Union Conference

² <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/water/sub-saharan-africans-spend-60-hours-a-year-finding-a-private-place-to-defecate-61462>

³ Rivers, lakes, or wetlands <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/water-and-sanitation-crisis-sub-saharan-africa/>

⁴ Irrigation in Africa in figures: AQUASTAT survey, 2005

⁵ Final communique: Ngor commitments on Water Security and Sanitation in Africa <http://africawaterweek.com/6/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/AWW6-Final-Communique-DAR-ES-SALAAM-ROADMAP.pdf>

While these commitments are welcome, millions of Africans are overwhelmed by problems such as high leakage levels⁶ and poorly maintained water infrastructure, which are not adequately addressed in the roadmap. As a result, resource poor households encounter heavy financial losses buying water.

In response to these concerns, African countries have put in place legal policy and planning frameworks. The Republic of Zambia for instance, has a 2020 National Water and Supply Sanitation Policy⁷. In 2018, a survey on demographic and health of Zambia established that 72 % of households (92% urban and 58% rural) obtain drinking water from an improved source⁸; a remarkable improvement of 7% from previous years. In Kenya, they have several sanitation policy and planning frameworks including: the Kenya Sanitation and Hygiene framework strategic plan (2016-2020), the Ministry of

“Managing water as an economic good is an important way of achieving efficient and equitable use, and of encouraging conservation and protection of water resources. (World Meteorological Organization, International Conference on Water and the Environment: Geneva 1992).”

Water and Sanitation Strategic plan of 2018-2022 and the Pro-Poor Implementation Plan for Water Supply and Sanitation 2007. The country has also made some reforms in the water sector including efforts to enhance the involvement in water provision by the private sector. Despite the availability of these legal policy and planning frameworks, gaps in implementation still persist.

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Weaknesses in Policy Implementation in Africa

It is important to assess the extent to which set out policies have been implemented. A review of current statistics indicates weaknesses in policy implementation in Africa. A 2020 report on water and sanitation indicated that in Zambia 4.8 million lived without clean water and 6.6 million did not have access to sanitation facilities⁹. In Kenya, a 2021 report by (water.org) revealed that 15% of the Population rely on unimproved water sources and, while 41% of residents in the East African Nation lack access to basic sanitation facilities. In Nigeria, a UNICEF report established that over 86 percent of Nigerians lacked access quality and safe water sources. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a large majority of the population does not have access to water and sanitation, and this is a result of the political instability that was previously experienced in the countries. This is the case in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

When Governments, the private sector and civil society organizations meet in Dakar, they will need to address the systemic issues behind the water stress in sub-Saharan Africa. Water is a right for all. The lack of it deprives our brothers and sisters of the *“freedom from fear and want.”* **We call for transparent and accountable governance that will match commitments with actions through integrated efforts by all actors.**

⁶ https://www.ielrc.org/activities/workshop_0704/content/d0702.pdf

⁷ https://www.mwdsep.gov.zm/?wpfb_dl=1217

⁸ (Central Statistical Office (Zambia), Zambia Demographic and Health Survey 2013-14 Now Zambia Statistics Agency)

⁹ <https://www.nfnc.org.zm/download/water-and-sanitation-policy-brief/>

The Role of Faith Communities

Central to this policy brief is the discussion on the role of faith actors in International Cooperation and Development. Through their unfettered presence among the local communities they serve, they contribute to global development outcomes¹⁰.

For instance, Caritas organisations working on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, with support of their partners and governments, accompany a number of community-based initiatives. They include: community dialogue on resource sharing, establishment and training of Village Peace Committees, construction of water¹¹ projects such as rainwater harvesting systems, provision of water tanks to education institutions and training of local communities on best practices in water sanitation and hygiene. Through community-based interventions by Diocesan Caritas Organisations in



Photo Courtesy: Caritas Marsabit in Northern Kenya

collaboration with the Local Governments, some communities have been declared open defecation free. Caritas Organisations additionally participate in policy dialogue at the national, regional and international level based on their field experiences.

Policy Recommendations

- The UN ECA, AU and African Development Bank should review the Africa Water Vision for 2025, based on the current context and update its publics on the progress of its implementation
- Governments should unlock financing for SDG 6 to address water scarcity in sub-Saharan Africa. These initiatives should be done in collaboration with actors in Health, Food and Nutrition Security, Climate Change and Disaster Management.
- Governments and experts in this field should build capacities on recycling wastewater by paying specific attention to the direct benefit on climate.
- The World Water Forum should create a space for innovative solutions to address water pollution and water loss in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Actors should train local communities on ecologically sound rainwater harvesting techniques.
- Governments should design clear policy and management interventions that support sustainable ground water use in arid and semi-arid regions and; contrasting socio-economic and institutional contexts.

¹⁰ In its work around the world Caritas witnesses the detrimental effects of water scarcity on families and communities, especially the poor. <https://www.caritas.org/2018/03/sharing-water/>

¹¹ Diocesan Caritas of Wamba in DRC : Twelve water sources amid construction within communities through a humanitarian assistance project <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/diocesan-caritas-wamba-drc-twelve-water-sources-amid-construction>

- Governments should address the unclear boundaries of the aquifers and the limitations on their sustainable use, which is translating into risks for indiscriminate use and confound traditional institutional arrangements when it comes to common resource management.
- All actors should promote intergenerational dialogue to preserve knowledge and promote utilisation of indigenous knowledge in water resources management and climate change adaptation.
- Decision makers should fulfil the commitments of the Grand Bargain on humanitarian localisation through partnerships with local and national actors in facilitating access to quality and safe water and sanitation facilities. They should also apply the human rights framework for water governance and operationalize migration management to ensure water security for all.
- Governments should acknowledge the contribution of Civil Society in enhancing water security and collaborate in research on water and sanitation and; use this data for planning, policy formulation and implementation.



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