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Item 8 (a) of the provisional agenda*
High-level parallel meetings to review in depth and showcase progress made and to facilitate peer-to-peer learning in connection with the sub-themes of the Forum: clean water and sanitation: assuring sustainable water availability and safe sanitation systems to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

Background report on the sub-theme of clean water and sanitation: assuring sustainable water availability and safe sanitation systems to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

I. Introduction

1. The present document provides an overview of progress towards the achievement in Africa of Sustainable Development Goal 6, on ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Goal is related to goal 7, on environmentally sustainable and climate resilient economies and communities, of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, and strategic objective 1.5 of the second 10-year implementation plan (2024–2033) of Agenda 2063,[1] on enhancing resilience of economies and communities to the effects of climate change.

2. African countries have reaffirmed their commitment to Goal 6 through high-level continental frameworks and declarations, aligning political will with measurable indicators for the Goal. For example, in September 2025, the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy was adopted at the fourteenth ordinary session of the governing council of the African Ministerial Council on Water (see box 1).

3. The present report will help in shaping an African common position in the context of the first implementation plan of the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy and the African Union theme for 2026 of "Assuring sustainable water availability and safe sanitation systems to achieve the goals of Agenda 2063", and in preparing for the 2026 high-level political forum on sustainable development and the 2026 United Nations Water Conference.

* ECA/RFSD/2026/1/Rev.1.

[1] African Union, *Decade of Accelerated Implementation: Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan, 2024–2033* (Addis Ababa, 2024).

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Box 1
Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy

Adopted at the fourteenth ordinary session of the governing council of the African Ministerial Council on Water, in September 2025, the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy is a long-term continental framework aligned with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, in which water security and safe sanitation are positioned as central drivers of economic transformation, climate resilience, food and energy security, and regional integration. Consequently, water is reframed as a strategic asset for prosperity, peace and human dignity, not merely a basic service. The Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy encompasses operational plans, financing strategies and measures to strengthen institutions, with a view to accelerating the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 6 and the implementation of Agenda 2063 across African States. It shall serve as the African common position for the 2026 United Nations Water Conference, helping to ensure that African priorities are reflected in global water governance and resource mobilization.

Source: Economic Commission for Africa and African Ministerial Council on Water.

II. Progress in implementation

4. In the present chapter, a summary is provided of the continent's progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 6 targets, using information supplied by custodian agencies under the coordination of UN-Water. Data are shown using Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) subregional classifications, where their consistent application across indicators was possible. For some indicators, the aggregation of the Northern Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa groupings of the Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use was used to support harmonized analysis and timely reporting.

A. Water, sanitation and hygiene for all

5. The two Goal 6 targets that relate to water, sanitation and hygiene for all are targets 6.1 (achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all) and 6.2 (achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations). Information in the present section is taken from, or calculated on the basis of, data set out in *Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene 2000–2024: Special Focus on Inequalities,* of the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene.[2]

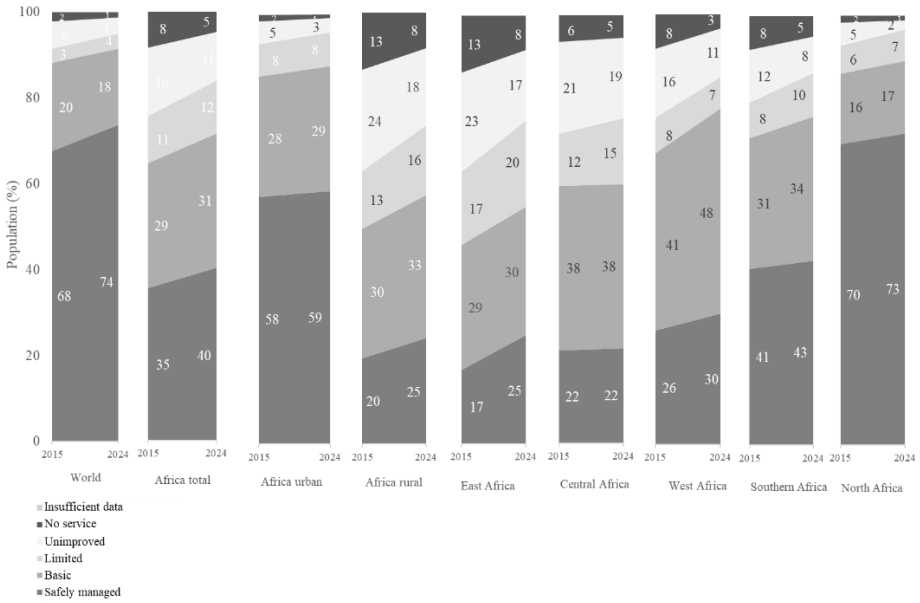
1. Achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all

6. Since 2015, coverage of safely managed drinking water has increased from 35 to 40 per cent, rising from 20 to 25 per cent in rural areas and from 58 to 59 per cent in urban areas, as shown in figure I. Over the period, 294 million people gained access to at least basic drinking water, including 177 million (116 million in urban areas and 61 million in rural areas) who gained access to safely managed drinking water.

[2] WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, *Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene 2000–2024: Special Focus on Inequalities* (Geneva, World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund, 2025).

7. Although Africa accounted for 25 of the 28 countries globally where more than one in four people lacked basic drinking water services in 2024, several countries on the continent have made significant progress. Among the countries globally recording the biggest increases, of more than 15 percentage points, in coverage of at least basic drinking water since 2015 are Somalia (21 percentage points), Mozambique (18 percentage points) and Uganda (15 percentage points). Morocco is one of eight lower-middle-income countries globally on track to reach universal coverage by 2030.

Figure I
Trends in drinking water coverage in Africa and globally, by service level, 2015–2024
(Percentage of the population)



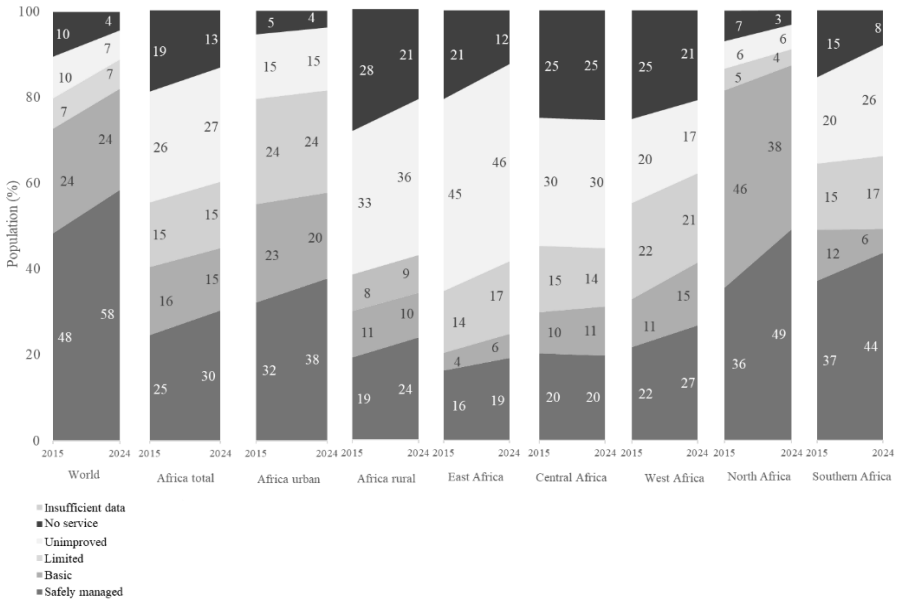
Source: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, *Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene 2000–2024: Special Focus on Inequalities* (Geneva, World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, 2025).

2. Access to adequate and equitable sanitation

8. In the period 2015–2024, coverage of safely managed sanitation in Africa increased from 25 to 30 per cent, rising from 19 to 24 per cent in rural areas and from 32 to 38 per cent in urban areas, as shown in figure II. Over the period, 187 million people gained access to at least basic sanitation, including 158 million (99 million in urban areas, 59 million in rural areas) who gained access to safely managed sanitation.

9. Some 201 million people in African countries practised open defecation in 2024, of which 94 million were in West Africa and 64 million were in East Africa. Since 2015, the proportion of the population practising open defecation was cut by a third, from 19 to 13 per cent, but, owing to population growth, the reduction in the actual number of people, from 229 million to 201 million, was more modest. In rural Cabo Verde, open defecation was cut by two thirds, from 33 to 10 per cent, and the practice has been eliminated in rural Eswatini, from a 2015 baseline of 9 per cent. In contrast, the population practising open defecation increased by at least 1 million in each of four sub-Saharan African countries (Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Niger and Nigeria), largely as a result of the overall population growing at a faster rate than the reduction in the proportion of the population practising open defecation.

Figure II
Trends in sanitation coverage in Africa and globally, by service level, 2015–2024
(Percentage of the population)



Source: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, *Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene 2000–2024* (see figure I).

3. Access to adequate and equitable hygiene

10. In the period 2015–2024, access to basic hygiene in Africa increased from 34 to 38 per cent, rising from 25 to 30 per cent in rural areas, but remaining unchanged at 48 per cent in urban areas, as shown in figure III. Over the period, 161 million people (90 million in urban areas, 71 million in rural areas) gained such access.

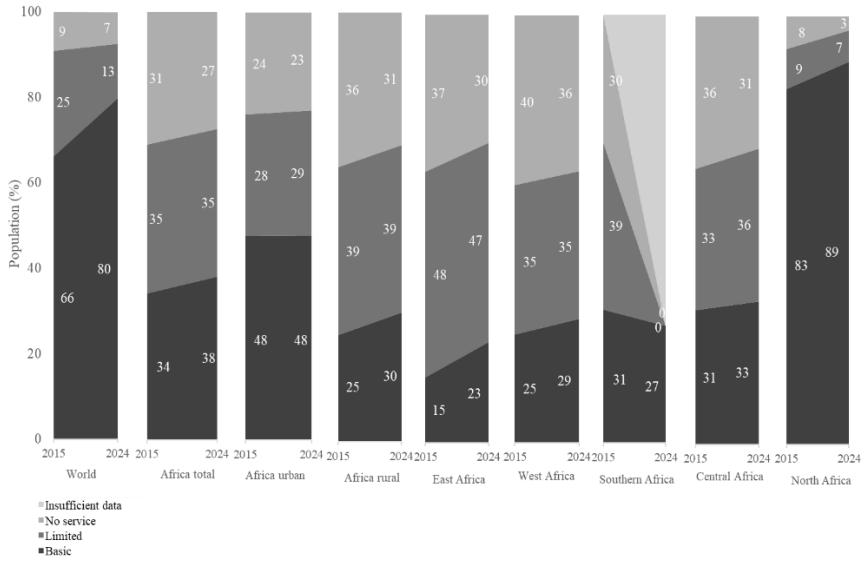
11. In 2024, 936 million people on the continent lacked access to basic hygiene services, mainly in East Africa (393 million), followed by West Africa (320 million) and Southern Africa (150 million). At the country level, the largest numbers were in Nigeria (160 million people), followed by Ethiopia (124 million), the United Republic of Tanzania (57 million) and the Sudan (45 million).

12. From 2015 to 2024, the largest increase in the availability of basic hygiene services at the national level was in Kenya, where it grew from 15 to 58 per cent overall, and by 33 percentage points in rural areas and by 63 percentage points in urban settings. The largest decreases were in Somalia, Mauritania and the Sudan, where coverage dropped by 14, 11 and 10 percentage points, respectively.

13. There are inequalities in hygiene services at the subnational level. In lower-middle-income countries, the ratio between the subnational areas with the highest and the lowest levels of basic hygiene services can become extreme: for example, in Senegal in 2019, basic hygiene services were available to 58 per cent of the population in Ziguinchor but to only 1 per cent in Kédougou.

14. In Africa, the share of the population that had no handwashing facilities dropped from 31 per cent in 2015 to 27 per cent in 2024. Owing to population growth, however, the actual number of people with no service increased from 378 million to 413 million.

Figure III
Trends in hygiene coverage in Africa and globally, by service level, 2015–2024
(Percentage of the population)



Source: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, *Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene 2000–2024* (see figure I).

B. Wastewater and water quality

15. Wastewater and water quality are the subject of target 6.3 (improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally).

1. Safely treated wastewater

16. In 2024, in sub-Saharan Africa, 19,877 million m^3 of household wastewater were generated, of which 19.4 per cent were safely treated,[3] whereas, in North Africa and West Asia, 18,913 million m^3 were generated, of which 64.5 per cent were safely treated.[4] Of the 31 African countries that have reported data in 2022 on the share of their domestic wastewater flows that is safely treated, the highest rates are in Algeria (76 per cent), Egypt (74 per cent), Tunisia (73 per cent), Zimbabwe (55 per cent) and Morocco (45 per cent), whereas the lowest are in Benin (1 per cent), Chad (2 per cent), Ethiopia and Burkina Faso (3 per cent), Uganda (4 per cent) and Malawi (6 per cent).[5]

[3] Wastewater is considered to be safely treated if it is discharged in line with relevant standards or treated to a level commensurate with secondary or higher processes.

[4] WHO, "Progress on the safe treatment of domestic wastewater: 2025 briefing note". Available at www.unwater.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/progress_on_the_safe_treatment_of_domestic_wastewater_-_2025_briefing_note.pdf.

[5] United Nations Human Settlements Programme and WHO, *Progress on the Proportion of Domestic and Industrial Wastewater Flows Safely Treated: Mid-term Status of SDG Indicator 6.3.1 and Acceleration Needs, with a Special Focus on Climate Change, Wastewater Reuse and Health* (n.p., 2024).

17. The share of industrial wastewater that is safely treated is 84 per cent in Ghana and 43 per cent in Ethiopia, the only two African countries that reported such data.[6]

2. Good ambient water quality

18. In sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of water bodies with good ambient water quality grew from 71 per cent in 2017 to 79 per cent in 2023, with increases in all types of water body, but especially rivers, for which the proportion rose from 55 to 72 per cent.[7] Reporting levels have nearly doubled, with 35 African countries reporting in 2023 compared with 18 in 2017. There are notable data gaps in North Africa.

19. For the first time, citizen science data have been used to improve national reporting on Goal 6 in Sierra Leone and Zambia, with similar initiatives under way in Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa and the United Republic of Tanzania.

C. Improved water use efficiency and water scarcity

20. Water use efficiency and water scarcity are the subject of target 6.4 (substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity). Unless otherwise stated, the information in the following paragraphs has been provided to ECA by UN-Water and is based on data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

1. Increase in water use efficiency

21. Substantial variations in water use efficiency[8] prevail among countries, with 64 per cent of the reporting African countries below the 2022 global average of $21.52 per m^3. Overall, in North Africa, water use efficiency has increased by 18.3 per cent since 2015, and in sub-Saharan Africa by 7.4 per cent. The greatest increases since 2015 were in Guinea-Bissau (85 per cent), Ethiopia (64 per cent), Benin (54 per cent), Côte d'Ivoire (52 per cent), Mali (49 per cent), the United Republic of Tanzania (46 per cent) and Burkina Faso (42 per cent). Decreases have been recorded in the Congo (29 per cent), Zimbabwe (25 per cent), Lesotho (13 per cent) and Angola (11 per cent).

22. Water use efficiency in the agricultural sector has improved significantly across Africa, rising by 21 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and by 27.8 per cent in North Africa from 2015 to 2022.[9] Over the same period in the industrial sector, it substantially decreased in North Africa, by 61 per cent, mainly in Algeria and Egypt, where it declined by 26 per cent and 71 per cent, respectively. In contrast, industrial water use efficiency more than doubled in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Senegal. In the service sector over the same period, water use efficiency improved in sub-Saharan Africa, by 8 per cent, and North Africa, by 16 per cent.

[6] Ibid.

[7] United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Progress on Ambient Water Quality: Mid-term Status of SDG Indicator 6.3.2 and Acceleration Needs, with a Special Focus on Health* (Nairobi, 2024).

[8] Efficiency is a measure of gross economic value added that is generated by the irrigated sector or sectors relative to the volume of water used.

[9] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), "Pressure on water resources", AQUASTAT Dissemination System. Available at https://data.apps.fao.org/aquastat/?lang=en (accessed on 1 January 2026).

2. Level of water stress and scarcity

23. Water stress levels[10] are critical across North Africa, where levels increased from 105 per cent in 2015 to 121 per cent in 2022,[11] highlighting acute pressures exacerbated by climate change. Agriculture, which accounts for more than 80 per cent of total water withdrawals, is the main contributor to the subregion's water stress levels. At the national level, the highest increases of water stress levels from 2015 to 2022 were in Egypt (30 percentage points), Cabo Verde (22 percentage points), Algeria (19 percentage points), Zimbabwe (14 percentage points), South Africa (8 percentage points), Kenya (7 percentage points) and Tunisia (6 percentage points). The aggregation of water stress values at the subregional and national levels, however, masks significant disparities within each subregion and country.

24. High water stress challenges agrifood systems by limiting irrigation and agricultural productivity and posing a threat to food security. In Libya and the Sudan, critical levels of water stress, of more than 100 per cent, are coupled with a prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity that is above the global average.

D. Integrated water resources management and transboundary cooperation

25. Integrated water resources management and transboundary cooperation are the subject of target 6.5 (implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate).

1. Integrated water resources management

26. Most African countries had medium-high or medium-low levels of implementation of integrated water resources management in 2023, meaning, respectively, that implementation had been started but was not always effective, or that arrangements had generally been approved and institutionalized but that implementation was limited.[12]

27. In sub-Saharan Africa, the degree of implementation increased from 40 per cent in 2017 to 49 per cent in 2023, with particular improvements in the enabling environment for implementation, and there has been progress across all African subregions, as shown in figure IV, with increases ranging from 6 percentage points in West Africa to 13 percentage points in Central Africa.[13] In the same period, the level of implementation increased by 20 percentage points or more in seven African countries: Rwanda (33), Angola (25), Somalia (24), Egypt (23), Sao Tome and Principe (21), Lesotho (20) and Zambia (20). At the current rate, however, sustainable water management is not projected to be achieved globally before 2049.

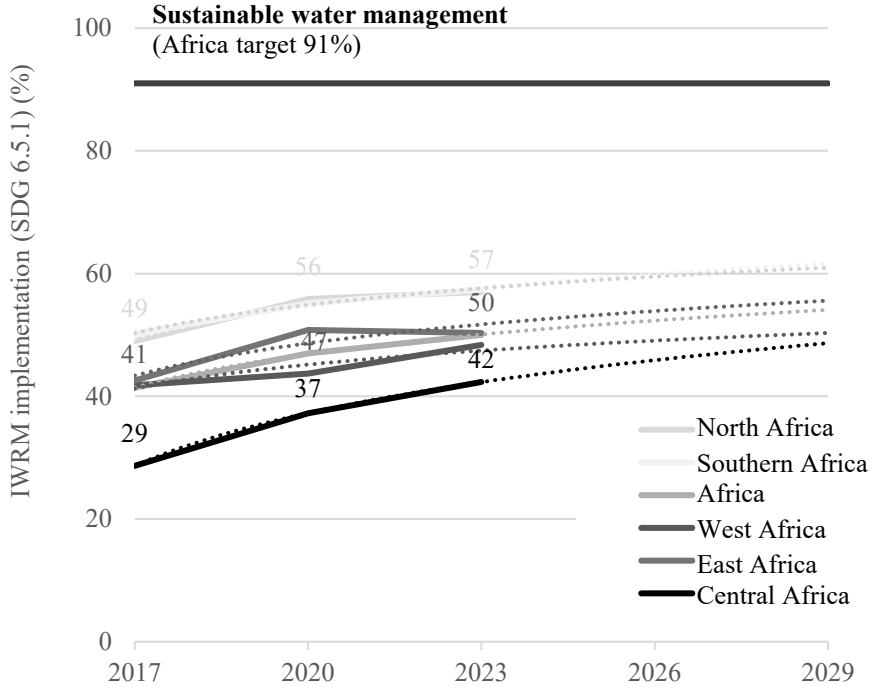
[10] Water stress is the ratio between total freshwater withdrawn and total renewable freshwater resources, after considering environmental flow requirements. A level above 100 per cent indicates that more water is being withdrawn than what can be replenished annually.

[11] FAO and UN-Water, *Progress on the Level of Water Stress: Mid-term Status of SDG Indicator 6.4.2 and Acceleration Needs, with a Special Focus on Food Security* (Rome, FAO, 2024).

[12] UNEP, *Progress on Implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management: Mid-term Status of SDG Indicator 6.5.1 and Acceleration Needs, with a Special Focus on Climate Change* (n.p., 2024).

[13] Ibid.

Figure IV
Average implementation level of integrated water resources management in Africa, by subregion, in 2017, 2020 and 2023, with projected trends to 2029
(Percentage)



Source: Adapted from African Ministerial Council on Water and United Nations Environment Programme–Danish Hydraulic Institute Centre on Water and Environment, "2025 IWRM-related progress in Africa: integrated water resources management (IWRM), disaster risk reduction, climate resilience, and financing for infrastructure, based on SDG 6.5.1", Technical Note (n.p., 2025).

Note: The global aspirational target for indicator 6.5.1 is to reach a "very high" degree of implementation, which is generally interpreted as 91 per cent and above.

2. Transboundary cooperation

28. Africa has 63 international transboundary river basins that cover 62 per cent of its land area,[14] making water security on the continent inherently transboundary and critical to food and energy systems across borders.

29. Operational coverage of arrangements for water cooperation has been growing. On average, 72 per cent of the transboundary basin areas of African countries is covered by operational arrangements, which is higher than the global average of 59 per cent; 90 per cent or more of the transboundary river and lake basin areas is covered by operational arrangements in 22 African countries, compared with 14 countries for transboundary aquifers.[15] The proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation – indicator 6.5.2 – for African countries is shown in figure V.

[14] African Water Facility, *African Water Facility Strategy 2026–2030* (n.p., 2025).

[15] United Nations and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation: Mid-term Status of Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 6.5.2, with a Special Focus on Climate Change – 2024* (Paris, 2024).

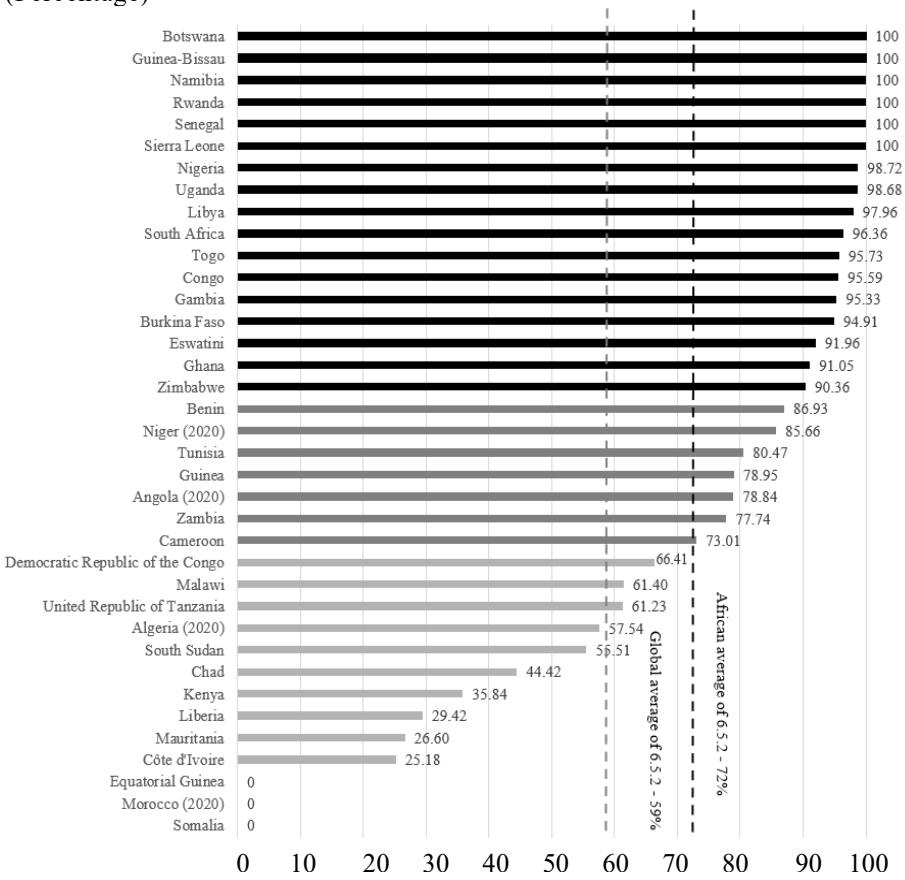
30. Emerging practical models for transboundary groundwater cooperation across Africa are highlighted in box 2.

Box 2
Emerging models for transboundary cooperation in Africa

Across Africa, several practical models are demonstrating the ways in which shared aquifers can be effectively integrated into transboundary water cooperation. Collaboration relating to the North-Western Sahara Aquifer System has been strengthened through a shared database and permanent consultation mechanism, and basin institutions, such as the Orange-Senqu River Commission, are advancing groundwater governance through plans for a multi-country mechanism for the Stampriet aquifer. Political commitment is growing, illustrated by a ministerial declaration on the Senegalo-Mauritanian aquifer basin and, in the Horn of Africa, the groundwater resilience programme of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. In East Africa, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania, guided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, are jointly developing a project on the Kilimanjaro transboundary aquifer, which involves harmonized data, shared monitoring and coordinated governance. Such efforts are reinforced by regional data platforms, including the Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme's Water Information Network System and the Groundwater Information System of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and emerging sustainable financing mechanisms, such as the Cubango–Okavango River Basin Fund.

Source: ECA, based on contributions from the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations International Children's Fund and Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

Figure V
Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 value for countries in Africa, 2023 (unless otherwise indicated)
(Percentage)



Source: Provided to ECA by UN-Water on the basis of data from United Nations and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation: Mid-term Status of Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 6.5.2, with a Special Focus on Climate Change – 2024* (Paris, 2024).

Note: Indicator 6.5.2 is the proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation. Indicator values are not available for Central African Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Gabon, Lesotho and the Sudan.

E. Water-related ecosystems

31. Target 6.6 concerns protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes.

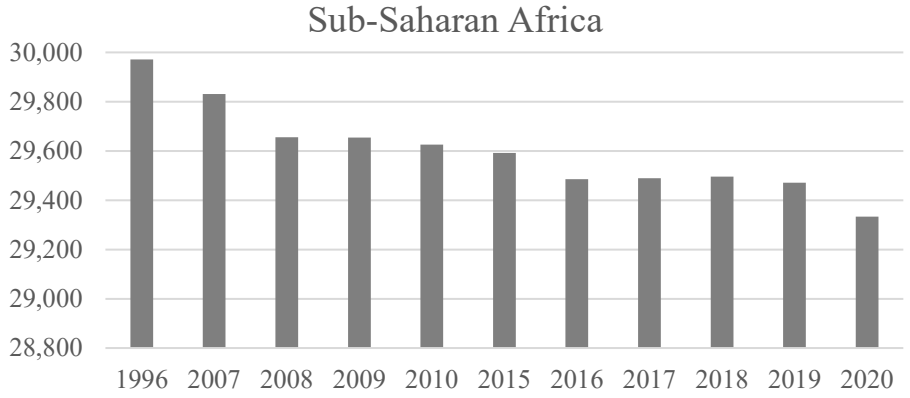
32. It was reported in 2024 that over 60 per cent of countries in sub-Saharan Africa had degraded freshwater ecosystems.[16] There has been a concerning trend of ecosystem decline in sub-Saharan Africa, with 30 per cent more countries there having one or more subindicators for target 6.6 in a state of degradation in 2020 compared with 20 years previously. In Western Asia and North Africa, 50–60 per cent of countries had degraded freshwater ecosystems and were also experiencing negative trends.

33. In Africa, some of the most important water-related ecosystems are wetlands and mangroves. In 2025, 21 per cent of the global total mangrove area

[16] UNEP, *Progress on Water-related Ecosystems: Mid-term Status of Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 6.6.1 and Acceleration Needs, with a Special Focus on Biodiversity* (n.p., 2024).

was in Africa, 15 per cent of which was in West and Central Africa and 6 per cent was in East and Southern Africa.[17] The mangrove extent in sub-Saharan Africa has declined since 1996, as shown in figure VI. It has been estimated that, in the period 2015–2025, Africa lost 2,770 ha per year, with 1,600 ha lost annually in West and Central Africa alone.[18]

Figure VI
Mangrove extent in sub-Saharan Africa, 1996–2020
(Square kilometres)



Source: United Nations Environment Programme, *Progress on Water-related Ecosystems: Mid-term Status of Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 6.6.1 and Acceleration Needs, with a Special Focus on Biodiversity* (n.p., 2024).

34. From 2020 to 2024, there was a loss in minimum river flow in 2.6 per cent of the river basins in sub-Saharan Africa.[19] In the period 2017–2021, river basins in such countries as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar, Namibia, South Africa and South Sudan, in sub-Saharan Africa, and Algeria, Egypt, Libya, the Sudan and Tunisia, in North Africa, experienced losses in minimum river flow compared with a baseline reference period of 2000–2019.[20]

F. International cooperation and participation of local communities

35. International cooperation and participation of local communities are the subject of target 6.a (expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies) and target 6.b (support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management).

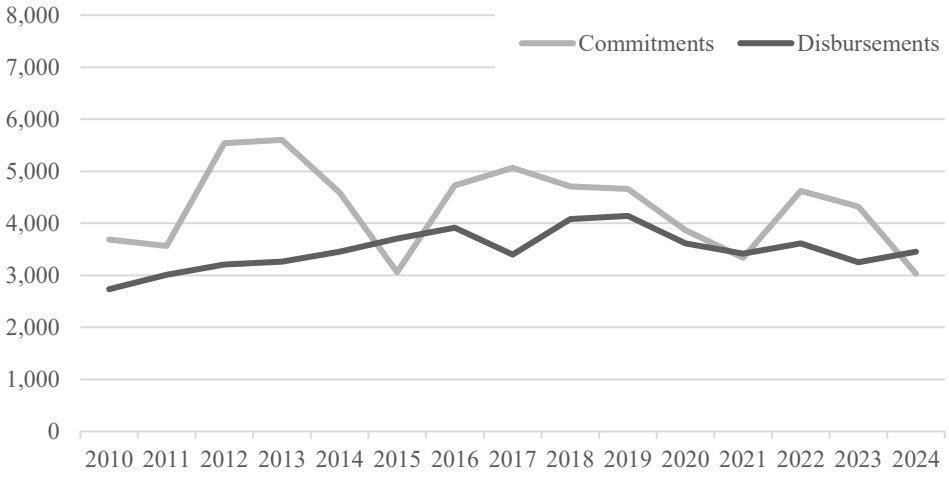
[17] FAO, *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2025* (Rome, 2025).
[18] Ibid.
[19] UNEP calculation based on data from the Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators Database.
[20] UNEP, *Progress on Water-related Ecosystems: Mid-term Status of SDG Indicator 6.6.1*.

1. International cooperation and capacity-building support

36. Disbursements of official development assistance relating to the water sector in Africa, representing the actual transfer of funds from donors to recipient countries, peaked in 2019 at $4.1 billion,[21] as shown in figure VII. Since then, disbursements have followed a generally declining trajectory, falling to $3.5 billion in 2024.

37. Most notably, commitments have declined sharply, dropping from $4.6 billion in 2022 to $3.0 billion in 2024.[22] That sustained contraction is a cause for concern, given that it is likely to translate into lower future disbursements and reduced investment capacity, underscoring the need for renewed international cooperation and financing focus in support of target 6.a in Africa.

Figure VII
Water sector official development assistance commitments and disbursements for Africa, 2010–2024
(Millions of United States dollars, constant 2023 values)



Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "CRS: creditor reporting system (flows)", OECD Data Explorer. Available at https://data- explorer.oecd.org/vis?lc=en&df[ds]=DcdDisseminateFinalDMZ&df[id]=DSD_CRS%40DF_CRS&df[ag]=OECD.DCD.FSD&dq=DAC..1000.100._T._T.D.Q._T..&lom=LASTNPERIODS&lo=5&to[TIME_PERIOD]=false (accessed on accessed 11 January 2026).

Note: Data include only official development assistance and exclude private development finance.

2. Participation of local communities

38. Community participation is widely embedded in national policy and legal frameworks across Africa. Overall, of 40 African countries that were assessed, 37 have defined procedures for local community participation in law or policy for rural drinking water services.[23] Similar results were reported for urban and rural sanitation and for water resources management, whereas slightly lower shares were observed for urban drinking water and hygiene. Only 16 of the countries, however, reported high levels of community participation

[21] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "CRS: Creditor Reporting System (flows)", OECD Data Explorer. Available at shttps://data- explorer.oecd.org/vis?lc=en&df[ds]=DcdDisseminateFinalDMZ&df[id]=DSD_CRS%40DF_CRS&df[ag]=OECD.DCD.FSD&dq=DAC..1000.100._T._T.D.Q._T..&lom=LASTNPERIODS&lo=5&to[TIME_PERIOD]=false (accessed on 11 January 2026).

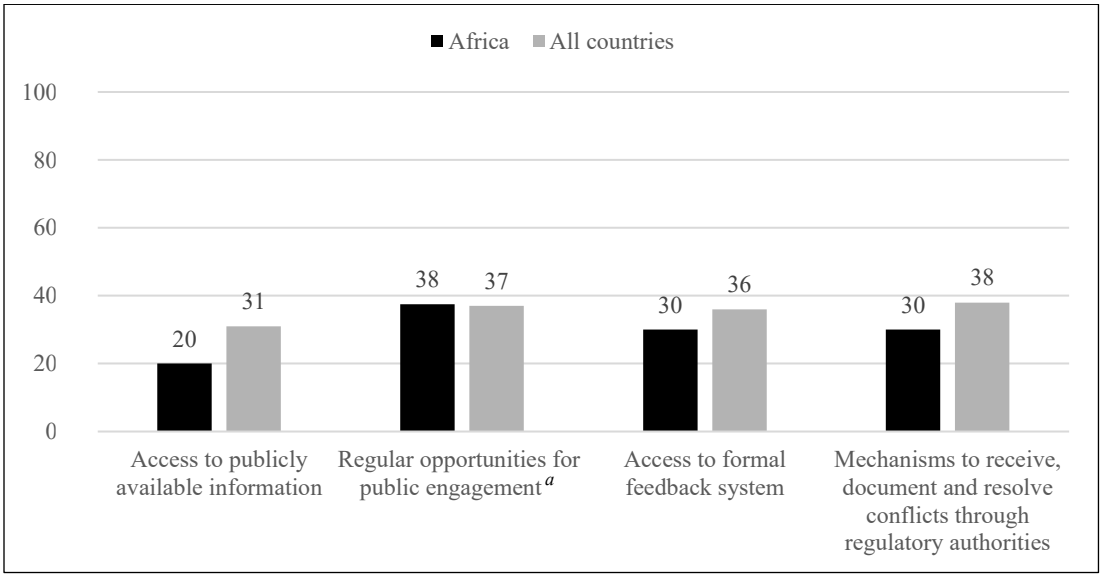
[22] Ibid.

[23] WHO, "GLAAS data portal", UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water. Available at https://glaas.who.int/glaas/data (accessed on 11 January 2026).

relating to rural drinking water services, which broadly aligns with global findings: some 92 per cent of countries globally have formal procedures in place, but only 38 per cent of them report high levels of participation. Figure VIII shows levels of rural participation in Africa and the world.

39. Community participation is closely linked with accountability mechanisms for service providers. Only 1 of 40 reporting African countries has sufficient financial resources to support user and community participation for rural sanitation and drinking water services, and only 2 have them for water resources management. Similarly, only five countries reported sufficient human resources for rural sanitation and drinking water participation, and four countries have them for water resources management, highlighting a major capacity challenge for strengthening community participation.

Figure VIII
Percentage of countries in which at least three quarters of the rural population have participation opportunities relating to sanitation and drinking water services



Source: World Health Organization, "GLAAS data portal", UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water. Available at https://glaas.who.int/glaas/data (accessed on 11 January 2026).

Note: "All countries" represents all 94 countries that participated in the assessment; "Africa" represents the 40 African countries that participated.

[a] May include meetings with service providers or local governments responsible for water, sanitation and hygiene services.

III. Challenges, constraints and emerging issues

40. Insufficient access to water, sanitation and hygiene services and widespread economic water scarcity remain pervasive across Africa, driven by underinvestment, infrastructural deficits, weak institutions and policies, capacity constraints, poverty and affordability barriers. The African Development Bank has estimated that the total annual investment required to achieve water security and sustainable sanitation in sub-Saharan Africa is $64 billion, which contrasts with current annual investments of only $10 billion–$19 billion.[24]

[24] International High-level Panel on Water Investments for Africa, *Africa's Rising Investment Tide: How to Mobilise US$30 Billion Annually to Achieve Water Security and Sustainable Sanitation in Africa* (n.p., 2023).

41. Rapid urbanization, with Africa experiencing one of the fastest rates globally, results in severe pressure on water utilities and municipal systems. Informal settlements and peri-urban areas often lack piped water and adequate sanitation, forcing residents to rely on unsafe services. Urban growth continues to outpace infrastructure development, leading to intermittent supply, quality issues and persistent inequities, compounded by weak regulatory oversight.

42. Inequalities between rural and urban areas, and among socioeconomic groups, persist. Rural communities often rely on basic or unimproved services, and impoverished urban populations face affordability barriers. Gender disparities remain stark, with women and girls bearing the burden of water collection, limiting their education and economic opportunities. Addressing equity requires targeted subsidies, inclusive planning and disaggregated monitoring frameworks that ensure no one is left behind.

43. Climate change is intensifying water-related risks, making adaptation a central priority. African countries face recurrent droughts, extreme floods and rising temperatures that undermine water availability, food systems and socioeconomic stability. In sub-Saharan Africa, climate adaptation needs are estimated at $30 billion–$50 billion annually, or 2–3 per cent of its gross domestic product.[25] Water stress also fuels conflict over shared resources, internal displacement and migration, positioning water as a peace and security issue. The nexus of water, climate and security is increasingly reflected in African adaptation strategies, with such initiatives as the Adaptation Benefit Mechanism, developed by the African Development Bank, helping to mobilize new finance for water-related resilience projects across the continent.[26]

44. Water governance remains fragmented despite the inherently interconnected nature of the water cycle. Important decisions affecting water resources are made across sectors, such as energy, agriculture and tourism, underscoring the need for integrated, cross-sectoral governance frameworks.

45. Persistent data gaps constrain effective planning and accountability. Aquifer monitoring remains sparse, groundwater reporting is inconsistent and data ownership is fragmented across institutions, with limited protocols for sharing sensitive data sets across borders.

IV. Opportunities, transformative actions, partnerships and ambitions

46. Achieving Goal 6 by 2030 demands strong political leadership and the adoption of acceleration road maps aligned with the five accelerators of the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework, namely finance, data and information, capacity development, innovation and governance.[27]

47. Goal 6 is both a stand-alone priority and a cross-cutting enabler of the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda. Together with UN-Water, ECA supports that fulfilment through regional resident coordinator clinics, which help United Nations country teams to use water as a powerful lever to accelerate efforts to attain the Goals and to integrate water more systematically into national and regional planning.

48. Continental initiatives, such as the Continental Africa Water Investment Programme and innovative financing instruments, including large-scale guarantee facilities and blended finance models, offer transformative potential

[25] World Meteorological Organization, *State of the Climate in Africa 2023* (Geneva, 2024).

[26] African Development Bank, “Adaptation benefit mechanism”. Available at www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/initiatives-partnerships/adaptation-benefit-mechanism-abm.

[27] UN-Water, “The Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework” (Geneva, 2020).

to unlock public and private capital. High-level political engagement, including through the Heads of State Initiatives of Sanitation and Water for All, is essential to securing domestic budget commitments and ensuring the creditworthiness needed to attract critical investment in the sector.

49. The blue economy, encompassing coastal, marine and inland aquatic ecosystems, offers an important entry point for advancing Goal 6 in Africa. With the African Union Commission forecasting the potential growth of the blue economy from $296 billion in 2018 to $576 billion by 2063,[28] there is a clear opportunity to harness investments in the blue economy with a view to supporting the achievement of Goal 6.

50. Acceleration requires next-generation capacity strategies in which technical skills, governance reform and digital literacy are integrated, in order that capacity development is transformed into a continent-wide, partnership-driven effort. There is therefore a need for a pan-African road map on building institutional strength progressively, from national water, sanitation and hygiene strategies, through subregional hubs, to a harmonized continental framework, supported by such initiatives as: the UN-Water Goal 6 capacity-development initiative; collaboration for francophone countries among the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Institute for Water and Environmental Engineering and the Institute for Water Education; and cooperation between academic and private technology firms to deliver cutting-edge skills in artificial intelligence-driven groundwater mapping, digital monitoring and climate-resilient design.

51. Strengthening national statistical systems and integrating digital tools and real-time monitoring platforms into them can revolutionize decision-making processes. The UN-Water data portal for Goal 6[29] is a good resource for holistic analysis, but the realization of its full potential will depend on capacity-building and the political prioritization of data transparency. Data partnerships, such as the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys programme, support the collection of disaggregated data for monitoring subnational inequalities in drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services, and can link data systems to accountability mechanisms that are led by Heads of State, ensuring that progress is tracked at the highest level.

52. Technological innovation is accelerating transformation, enabling new approaches to planning, financing and governance. Artificial intelligence-powered groundwater mapping and satellite analytics are improving resource planning and drilling success rates, and smart metering and digital dashboards support real-time monitoring and predictive maintenance.

V. Conclusion and main messages

53. Although progress towards the attainment of Goal 6 has accelerated in parts of Africa, most indicators continue to reflect uneven performance, unresolved service gaps and growing resource pressures. Across the continent, the indicators show steady but uneven progress since 2015. Access to at least basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services has expanded, but safely managed services remain limited in most subregions, with pronounced rural-urban and subnational disparities. Wastewater treatment and ambient water quality indicators have improved in a growing number of countries, but overall coverage remains limited and highly variable. Water use efficiency has increased, in particular in agriculture, whereas water stress remains critical in North Africa and increasingly heterogeneous within countries, with pressures within basins often masked by national averages. Integrated water resources

[28] ECA/RFSD/2025/8, box 1.

[29] See www.sdg6data.org/en.

management implementation has advanced from low to medium levels in most countries, but performance varies across institutional, financial and participatory dimensions. Transboundary water cooperation represents a relative strength, whereas indicators on water-related ecosystems highlight widespread degradation and adverse trends. Overall, the Goal 6 indicators reflect incremental progress alongside persistent service quality gaps and rising pressures on water resources and ecosystems.

54. Members of ECA, entities of the United Nations system, the African Union and their development partners should:

(a) Mobilize and strengthen political and technical leadership, awareness and commitment, and enhance knowledge at the regional, subregional, national and local levels by carrying out widespread dissemination of the Africa Water Vision 2063 and its Policy framework in order to drive synergistic attainment of Goal 6 and implementation of the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy;

(b) Elevate water as a strategic pillar of job creation, growth and overall sustainable development by promoting its political, economic and social value across national and regional development frameworks, including through the recognition of water security and sanitation as foundational to production and industrialization, climate resilience, food and energy systems, public health, urban development and peace and as critical accelerators of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;

(c) Formulate and execute robust implementation and capacity-building policies, plans and programmes at the regional, national and local levels to achieve measurable results relating to Goal 6 and the goals of the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy, with priority actions that should include the timely adoption and implementation of the first Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy implementation plan (2026–2033), reform to national water sector strategies and the integration of water as a funded priority within circular and blue economy frameworks and across vital sectors, including agriculture, health, energy, industry, climate and biodiversity;

(d) Mobilize sustainable and innovative financing, and adopt tailored financing models to support the implementation of the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy and Goal 6 by, for example, addressing debt challenges, expanding domestic public investment, improving financial efficiency and sustainability, scaling up public-private partnerships and leveraging continental and international financing mechanisms, with a view to aligning resources with national and continental priorities for water security, resilience and inclusive development;

(e) Leverage the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy and the United Nations System-wide Strategy for Water and Sanitation alongside the Sustainable Development Goal 6 Global Acceleration Framework in order to strengthen cross-sectoral water governance and investments, and drive coherence, coordination and measurable impact at the subnational, national and regional levels;

(f) Strengthen operational arrangements for shared surface-water and groundwater resources through joint efforts to harmonize the collection and use of data, joint planning, sustained financing and institutional cooperation, thereby positioning transboundary waters as assets for climate resilience, food security and peacebuilding;

(g) Mainstream climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction into water resources management and water, sanitation and hygiene planning, prioritizing drought and flood risk management, groundwater resilience, ecosystem protection and basin-level efforts, in order to reduce vulnerability and strengthen resilience;

(h) Ensure universal, equitable and affordable access to safely managed water, sanitation and hygiene services by applying systemic and rights-based approaches that address gender inequalities, rural-urban disparities and the needs of children and other vulnerable or marginalized populations, leaving no one behind;

(i) Prioritize investment in data systems, monitoring, research, digital tools and innovation in order to enable evidence-based decision-making, support cooperation, improve accountability and transparency, address subnational inequalities and promote adaptive water management;

(j) Put in place financed plans to assist national and local governments, the private sector and civil society in implementing the outcomes of the 2026 United Nations Water Conference, bearing in mind the need to translate political commitments into time-bound, measurable and financed actions and investment pathways, aligned with national priorities, and to sustain momentum for water and sanitation beyond 2030.