



ECOSOCC
Economic Social & Cultural Council

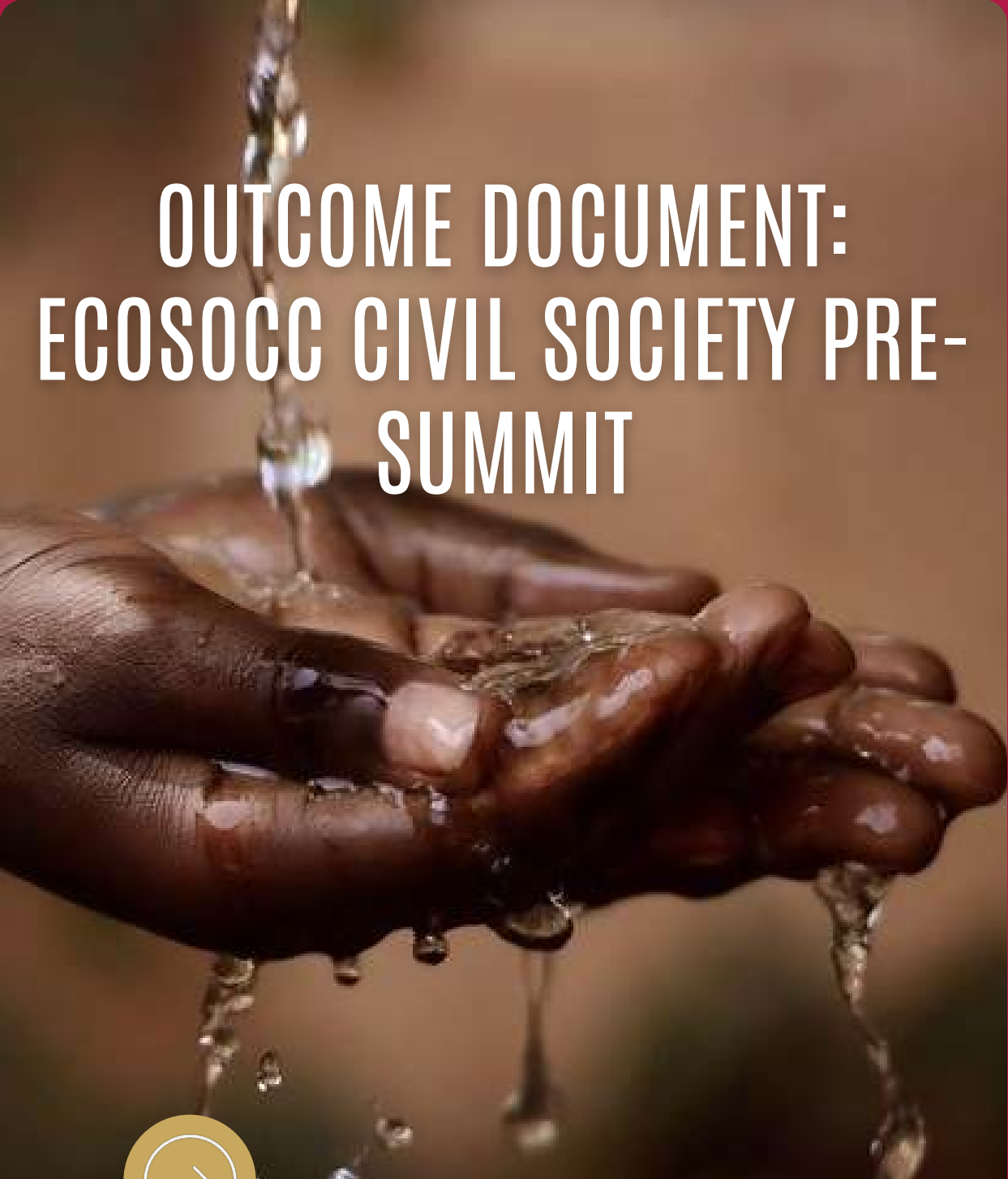
2026 PRE-SUMMIT REPORT



An organ of the



AACC-CETA



OUTCOME DOCUMENT: ECOSOCC CIVIL SOCIETY PRE- SUMMIT



Theme: Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063

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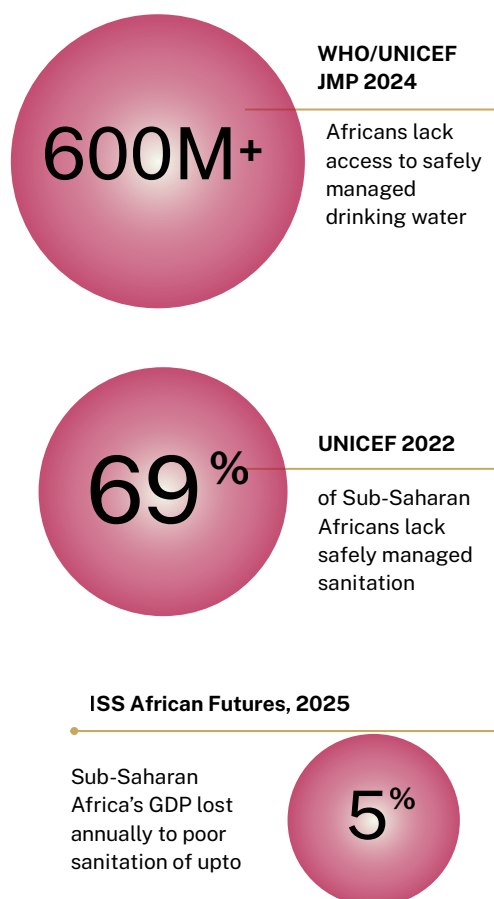
Introduction

"Water and sanitation are not isolated sectoral concerns, they are fundamental enablers of Africa's development, touching public health, food security, energy, education, industrialization, climate resilience, and social stability."

The African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) convened the ECOSOCC Civil Society Pre-Summit providing a critical platform to deliberate on the 2026 African Union Theme of the Year: "Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063." Speakers underscored that water and sanitation underpin public health, food security, energy production, education, industrialization, climate resilience, and social stability.

The opening messages collectively established a clear expectation: to move beyond broad policy statements toward concrete, inclusive, and implementable actions capable of delivering sustainable water and sanitation services to the people most in need. The emphasis on evidence, inclusion, innovation, community voices, and civic participation framed the Pre-Summit's mission.

Key Statistics



Message from our leaders



The Pre-Summit Programme was on 9th February 2026 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The Pre-Summit was organized in collaboration with key partners including the TrustAfrica; the African Renaissance; the INCLUDE Knowledge Platform; the Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU); Reform Initiatives; the All-Africa Conference of Churches (AACC); Amani Africa Media and Research Services; the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ); and the AFROBAROMETER Network.

The event brought together representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs) across Africa and the diaspora, AU organs, regional economic communities (RECs), policymakers, academia, development partners, private sector actors, faith-based organizations, youth and women's networks, and thematic experts to deliberate on the implementation of the 2026 African Union Theme of the Year: "Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063."

The Opening



**Setting the Tone for the
2026 AU Theme of the
Year**



AFRICAN UNION THEME OF THE YEAR Sustainable Water Availability and Safe to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063



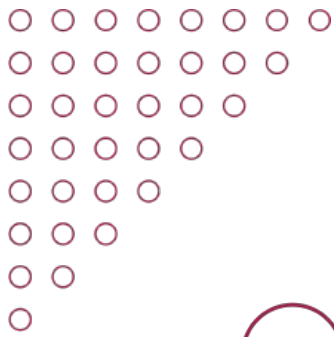
A Call for Urgency, Inclusion, and Action

The Pre-Summit was officially opened by a distinguished panel of leaders who set a tone of inclusion, urgency, civic participation, and action-oriented reflection. Opening remarks emphasized that water and sanitation are not isolated sectoral concerns but fundamental enablers of Africa's development.

Speakers highlighted the critical role of the private sector, particularly SMEs, in addressing Africa's infrastructure gap in water and sanitation, and called for governments to create enabling policy

environments that support African private sector participation, technology transfer, and product development.

Civil society was recognized as a critical actor in ensuring that policy discussions are informed not only by technical frameworks but also by the lived realities of communities experiencing water scarcity, inadequate sanitation, and climate-related shocks.



Distinguished Speakers

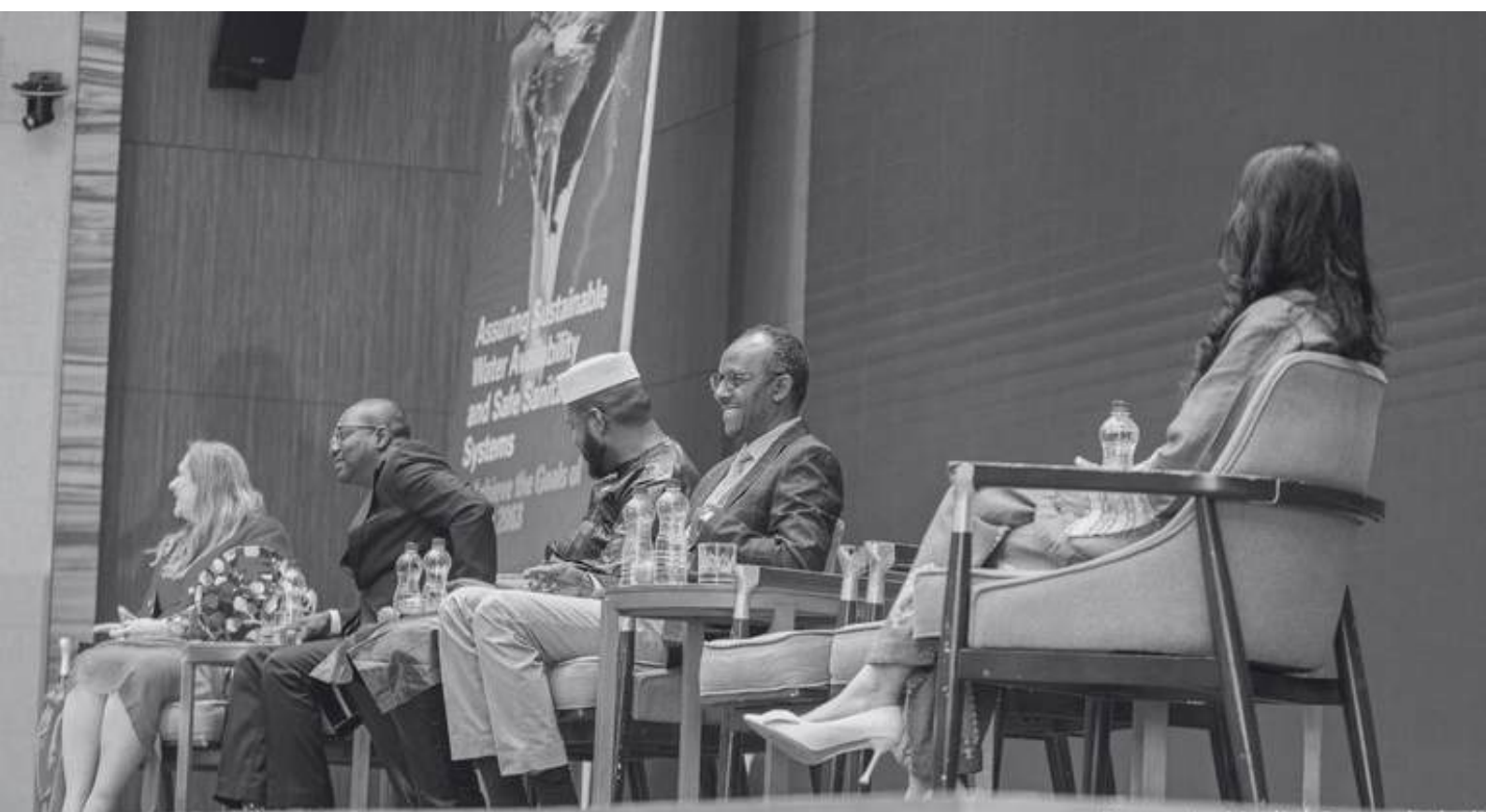
- **Amb. William Carew:** Head of the ECOSOCC Secretariat
- **Dr. Amany Asfour:** President, Africa Business Council (AfBC)
- **H.E. Mr. Moses Vilakati:** Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy & Sustainable Environment
- **H.E. Dr. Eng. Habtamu Itefa:** Minister of Water and Energy, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
- **Hon. Neema Lugangira:** Secretary General, Women Political Leaders (WPL) Session Moderator

“

Water and sanitation must be understood not only as service delivery challenges but as strategic issues linked to sovereignty, resilience, peace, inclusion, and human dignity.

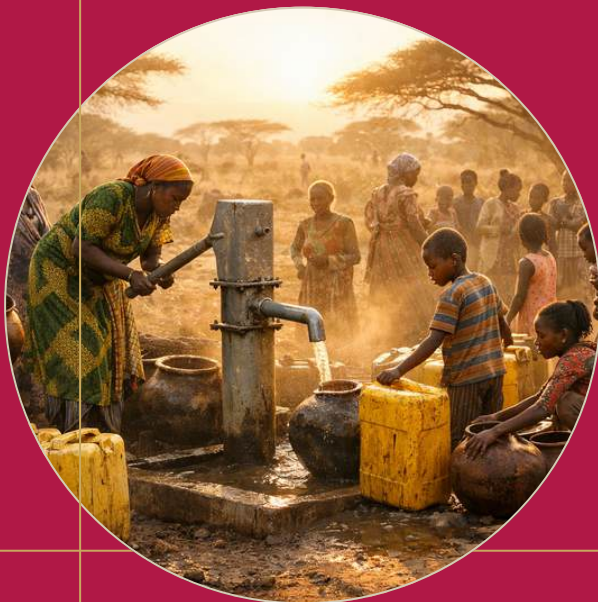
”

-Mr. Louis Cheick Sissoko, Presiding Officer of ECOSOCC



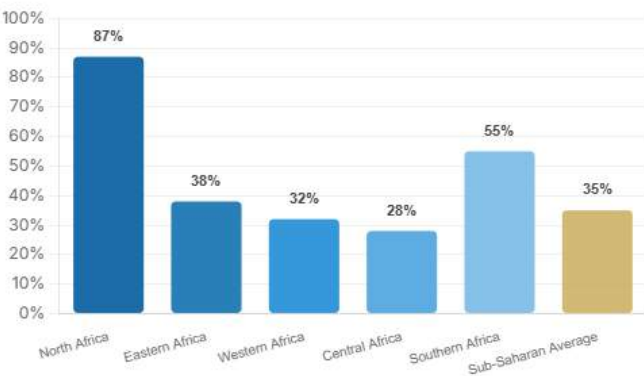
The Data Behind the Crisis: Africa's Water & Sanitation Challenge by the Numbers

Evidence-based data underpins every recommendation from the Pre-Summit. These charts illustrate the scale of the challenge and the urgency of action across the continent.



Access to Safely Managed Drinking Water

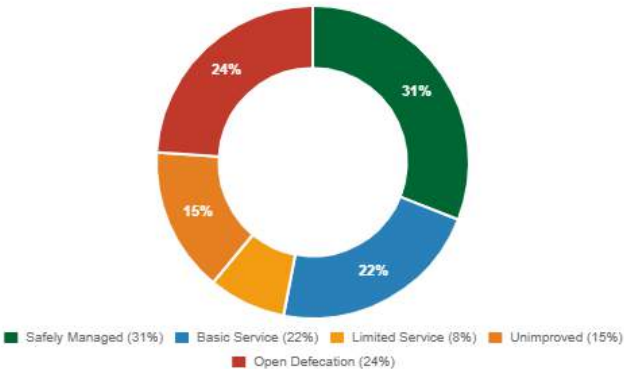
Population with safely managed water services by African sub-region, 2024 (%)



Source: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) 2024

Sanitation Service Ladder — Sub-Saharan Africa

Distribution of population by sanitation service level, 2022 (%)

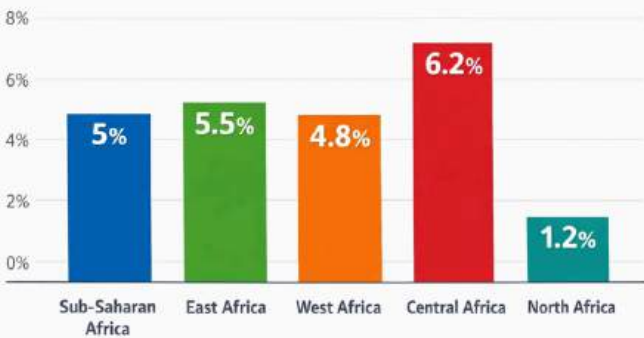


Source: UNICEF Progress on Sanitation and Hygiene in Africa, 2022

Africa's Annual Water Investment Gap (USD Billion/year)



Annual GDP Loss Attributable to Inadequate Water and Sanitation by Region (%)



Pillars of the Water & Sanitation Agenda

The Pre-Summit proceeded in line with the proposed programme, which featured a series of thematic sessions. These included a high-level opening and scene-setting session on implementing the AU Theme of the Year equitably and effectively.

The Pre-Summit identified four interconnected pillars essential to delivering sustainable water availability and safe sanitation across Africa by 2063.



Governance & Accountability:

Strengthening inclusive decision-making processes, institutional coordination, and transparency across all levels of government and civil society.



Innovative Financing:

Mobilizing the \$30B annual investment needed through diverse mechanisms including public-private partnerships, regional financing institutions, and development partners.



Transboundary Cooperation:

Treating shared water resources as instruments of peace, regional integration, and joint development rather than sources of division among states.



Inclusion & Equity:

Centering women, youth, and marginalized communities as active participants and decision-makers not passive beneficiaries in water and sanitation governance.



ECOSOCC
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Session-by- Session Outcomes





Plenary 1: Setting the Scene: Unpacking the 2026 AU Theme



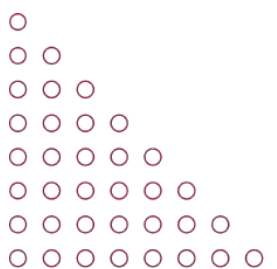
The session featured contributions from Mr. Nelson Gomonda, Officer in Charge, African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW); Mr. Charles Michael Akol, Environmental Affairs Officer, Green Economy and Blue Economy Section, Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resource Management Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA); and was moderated by Mr. Rotimi Olawale, Executive Director, Youth Hub Africa.

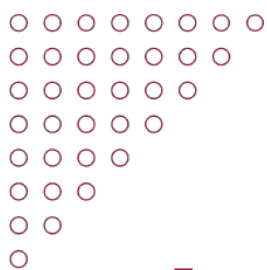
This session set the scene for the day's discussions by unpacking the 2026 African Union Theme of the Year. Speakers situated the Theme within Africa's persistent water and sanitation challenges and emphasized the urgency of translating continental commitments into practical action at national and community levels.

Speakers emphasized that implementation must focus on "the people who are most in need,"

stressing that addressing inequity and inclusion is central if Africa is to achieve universal access to water and sanitation. Implementation should be evidence-driven and data-driven, highlighting the importance of identifying who is affected and where the greatest needs are so that policies and resources can be effectively targeted.

The session reflected on the relationship between water scarcity, climate stress, and conflict, citing examples from regions such as the Sahel, Somalia, and Sudan, and noting that future conflicts in Africa may increasingly revolve around water resources and governance. Speakers emphasized the importance of transboundary water cooperation, noting that shared water resources should be treated as units for peace, regional integration, and joint development.





Emerging Issues Identified

- Persistent inequity and exclusion in water and sanitation programmes, particularly affecting women, youth, and marginalized communities
- Weak data systems and insufficient evidence-based targeting of populations most affected
- Limited participation of women's and youth groups in water governance processes
- Increasing links between water scarcity, climate variability, fragility, and conflict
- Weak transboundary water governance frameworks including limited data sharing
- Insufficient mainstreaming of water across sectors such as agriculture, energy, and industrial development
- Governance and financing challenges including poor coordination and inefficient resource allocation

Policy Recommendations

- Collect and analyze data to identify who is most affected by water and sanitation gaps
- Design and implement concrete actions that deliver services to women, youth, and marginalized groups
- Ensure meaningful engagement of women's and youth groups in planning and accountability
- Invest in and strengthen transboundary water cooperation and governance
- Mainstream water across all sectors to reflect its full economic and developmental value
- Develop and mobilize innovative financing mechanisms to support water-related programmes
- Address governance gaps by strengthening institutional coordination and stakeholder participation

“We want to make a positive impact “



Session 1:

Climate Resilience, Energy Transition & Transboundary Water Governance



Strengthening inclusive decision-making processes, institutional coordination, and transparency across all levels of government and civil society.





When Water Governance Meets Climate Politics



The session featured contributions from Ms. Bezawit Fantu, Systems Design and Technology Adoption Specialist, ThinkPlace Africa; Hon. Neema Lugangira, Secretary General, Women Political Leaders (WPL) and Former Member of Parliament; and Dr. Fiona Wanjiku Moejes, CEO and Director of Programmes at the Mawazo Institute, and was moderated by Ms. Victoria Many, Knowledge Manager, INCLUDE Platform.

This session examined how Africa's energy transition is increasingly shaped by the governance of shared water resources under conditions of climate stress. Discussions highlighted the growing pressure that climate variability places on water resources, and the implications this has for hydropower generation which currently contributes 20% of Africa's electricity generation agricultural systems, industrial production, and regional energy security.

A key theme was the political dimension of transboundary water governance. Speakers observed that technological solutions alone

cannot resolve water governance challenges when institutional coordination and political incentives for cooperation are weak. Leaders often prioritize short-term national interests or domestic energy needs, even when long-term regional cooperation would generate broader benefits for energy security and climate resilience.

Speakers highlighted that many regional water institutions lack adequate enforcement mechanisms, financing, and political authority, limiting their ability to manage shared water resources effectively. As a result, fragmented decision-making across sectors and national boundaries increases climate risks and weakens collective resilience. Another critical issue was the lack of trust and limited data sharing between countries sharing water resources. While technological capabilities such as climate modelling, satellite monitoring, and digital data systems are improving rapidly, institutions responsible for transboundary water governance often lack clear mandates, coordination frameworks, and mechanisms to translate shared data into joint decision-making.

Emerging Issues Identified

- Increasing climate variability and water stress threatening water-dependent energy systems across Africa
- Weak institutional coordination and fragmented governance frameworks for transboundary water resources
- Political incentives that favor short-term national interests over long-term regional cooperation
- Limited enforcement authority and financing for regional water institutions
- Lack of trust and limited data sharing among countries sharing transboundary water resources
- Insufficient integration between climate science, technological innovations, and governance systems
- Weak integration of academic research, indigenous knowledge, and community experiences

Policy Recommendations

- Strengthen regional and transboundary water governance frameworks for coordinated water management
- Align national energy planning with regional water governance mechanisms
- Promote data-sharing agreements ensuring shared information leads to coordinated decisions
- Invest in climate data systems, digital monitoring tools, and decision-support technologies
- Build political incentives for cooperation by linking water governance to regional energy security
- Strengthen the capacity, financing, and authority of regional water institutions
- Integrate academic research, indigenous knowledge, and community experiences into policy processes





63%

International river basins shared across African borders, covering 64% of the continent's land area

7

Major shared lakes including Victoria, Tanganyika, Malawi, Chad, Volta, Turkana, and Albert

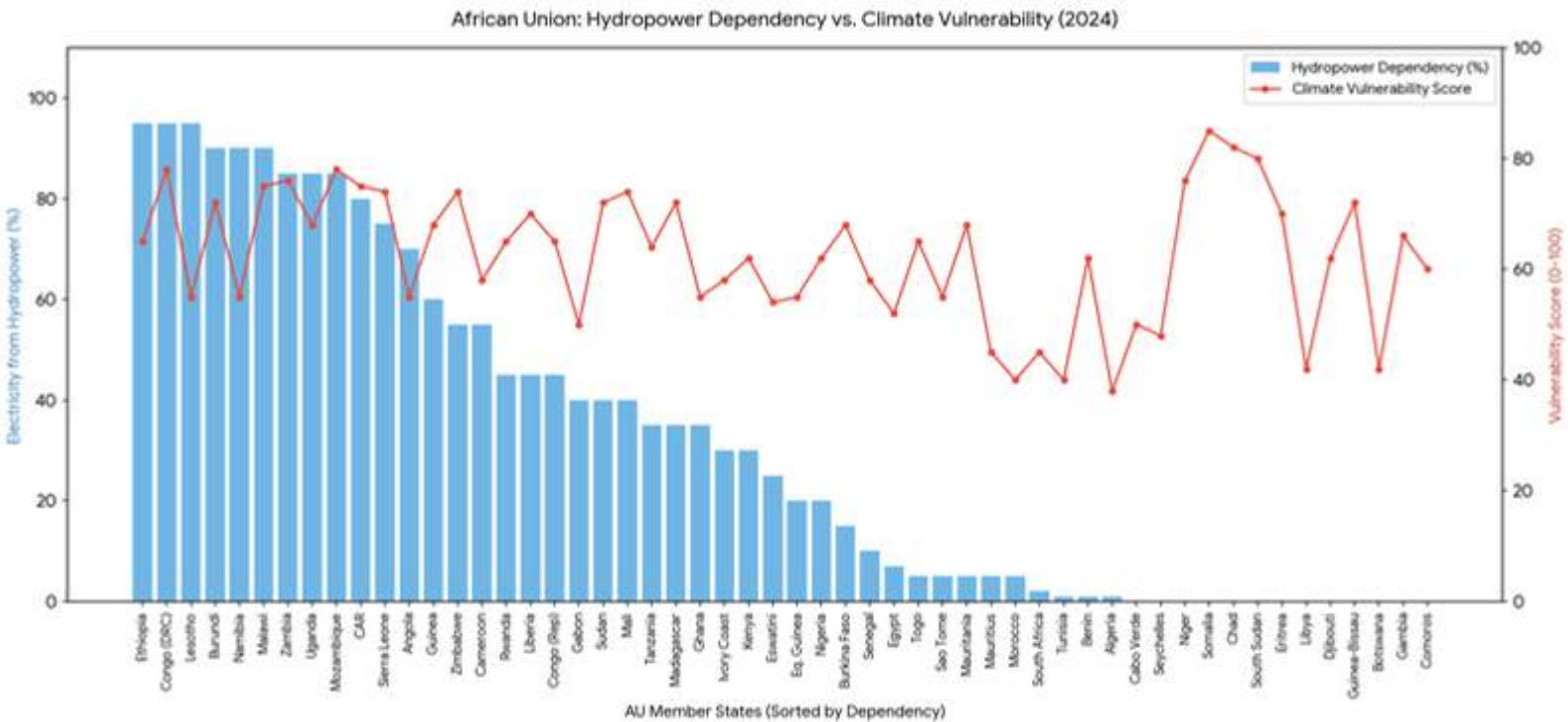
40+

Countries share at least one major transboundary water body, making cooperation essential for water security

4.3%

GDP reduction linked to Africa's water and sanitation access gap, constraining economic growth continent-wide

Source: UNECE Governance Architecture for Transboundary Waters in Africa, 2025; African Business Magazine, 2026



Session 2:

The Right to Sanitation: Gender, Youth & Social Inclusion



Centering women, youth, and marginalized communities as active participants and decision-makers not passive beneficiaries in water and sanitation governance.





ACTION FRAMEWORK AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES



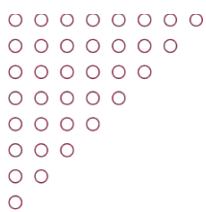
The session featured contributions from Ms. Amen Biniyam, Project Lead, Pan-African Adolescent Girls Movement; Mr. Don Deya, Executive Director, Pan-African Lawyers Union (PALU); Mr. Demba Keita, Honourable Member of the Association of Senegalese Members of Parliament and Expert on Water and Sanitation Governance; H.E. Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor, African Union Commissioner Emeritus; and was moderated by Ms. Caroline Kwamboka, Executive Director of African Renaissance.

Speakers emphasized that although Africa has made progress in developing policy commitments and institutional frameworks on water and sanitation, there remains a significant gap between normative commitments and practical implementation on the ground. While many countries have adopted policies and strategies addressing sanitation, very few tools exist to translate these commitments into inclusive, enforceable, and adequately financed actions. A central theme was what speakers described as the “sanitation paradox” faced by women and girls across the continent. Inadequate sanitation

manifests in unsafe, distant, or non-existent toilets; fear and insecurity when accessing sanitation facilities at night; missed school days; loss of income opportunities; and increased exposure to violence and health risks.

The session explored the possibility of developing an African-led general recommendation on the right to sanitation for women and girls a normative and implementation tool that could help translate continental commitments into practical guidance for governments and institutions.

- **Education:** School absenteeism among girls due to lack of menstrual hygiene management facilities, contributing to lower educational attainment
- **Health:** Increased exposure to waterborne diseases, health complications, and gender-based violence linked to inadequate sanitation
- **Economic:** Loss of income opportunities and reduced economic participation for women and girls
- **Safety:** Fear and insecurity when accessing distant or poorly lit sanitation facilities, especially at night
- **Rights:** Violation of the fundamental human right to sanitation, dignity, and bodily autonomy



Emerging Issues Identified

- Persistent gap between sanitation commitments and enforceable, adequately financed implementation
- Unsafe, inaccessible, and inadequate sanitation facilities affecting women, girls, and youth
- Limited integration of gender, age, disability, geography, and income in sanitation planning
- Lack of operational tools to translate commitments into legal frameworks and financing systems
- Continued marginalization of youth and women in decision-making processes
- Insufficient integration of menstrual hygiene management in sanitation infrastructure

Policy Recommendations

- Explore and develop an African-led general recommendation on the right to sanitation for women and girls
- Strengthen efforts to translate sanitation commitments into legal provisions, regulatory frameworks, and budgets
- Engage young people directly in AU and national policy processes on sanitation
- Encourage Member States to submit reports to regional human rights bodies on sanitation commitments
- Ensure women, girls, youth, and marginalized populations are centered as decision-makers, not passive beneficiaries
- Promote stronger integration of menstrual hygiene management in sanitation programming and legal frameworks



Session 2 Consensus, ECOSOCC Pre-Summit 2026

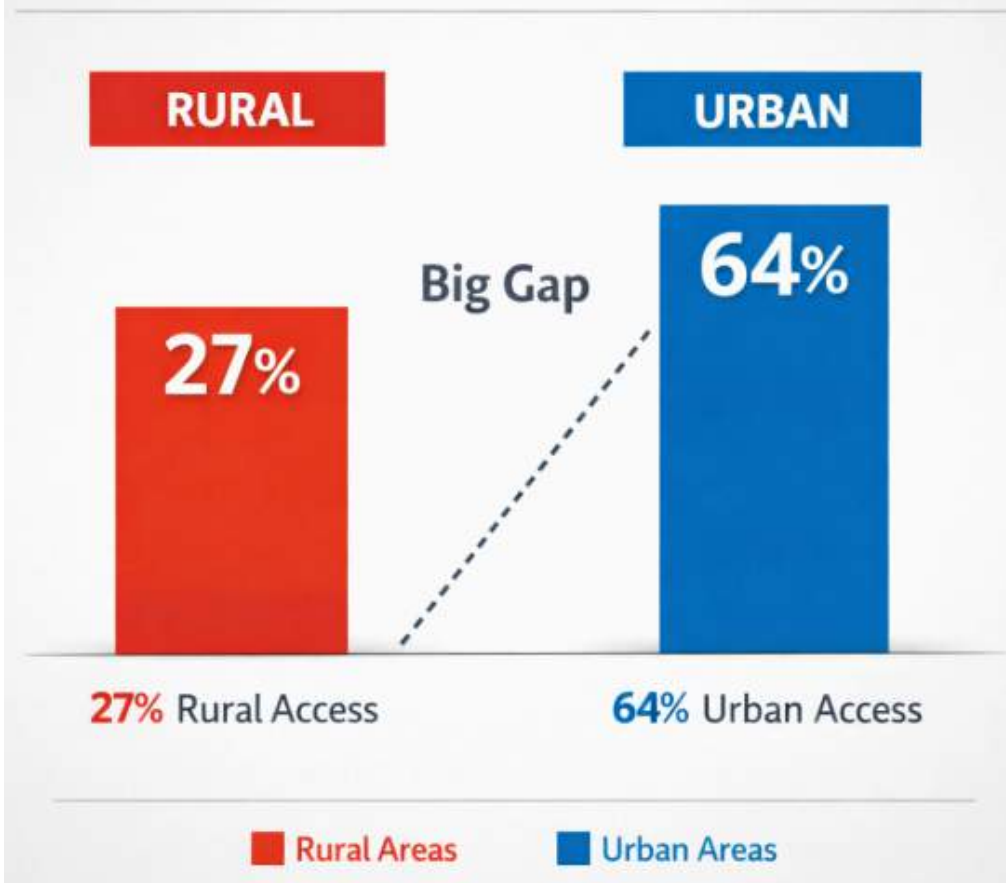
Youth and women must be engaged directly in policy development, implementation, and monitoring processes ensuring that their perspectives shape decisions affecting their lives.

Rural vs. Urban Sanitation Access Gap

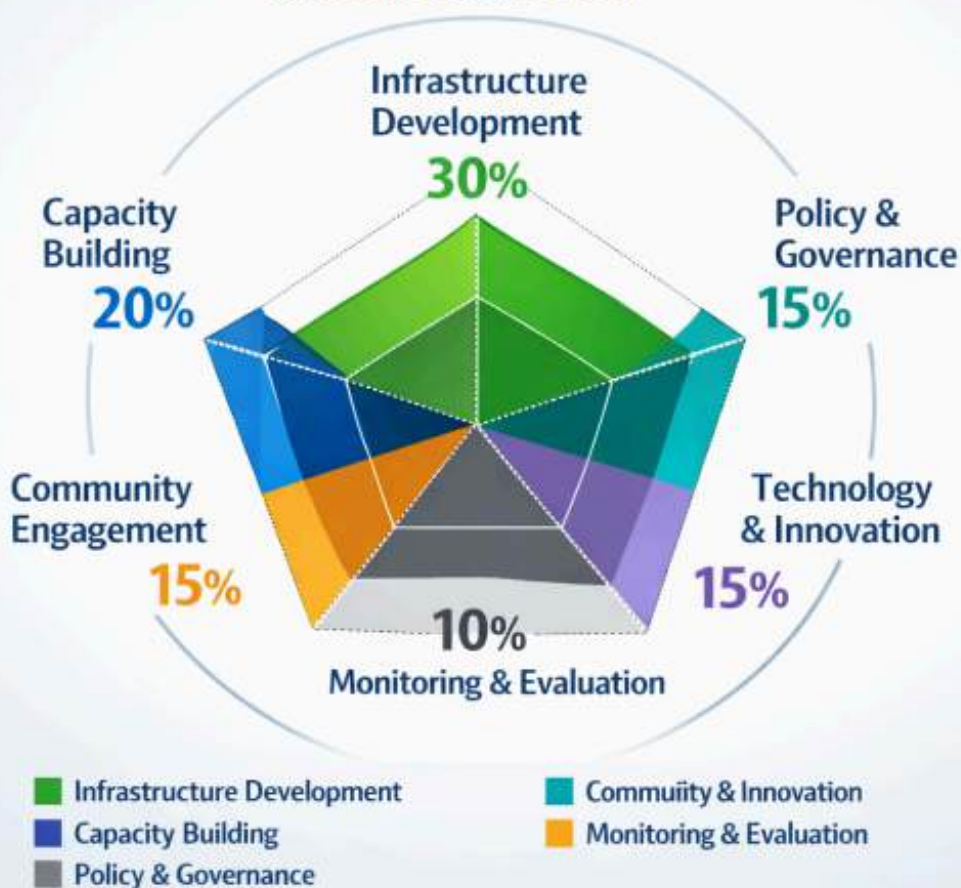
Population with safely managed sanitation by area type, Sub-Saharan Africa 2022 (%)

Source: UNICEF/WHO JMP 2022

Population with Safely Managed Sanitation in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2022



Recommended Sanitation Investment Allocation



Sanitation Investment Priorities

Recommended allocation of sanitation investment across key areas

Source: ECOSOC Pre-Summit Policy Recommendations, 2026

Session 3:

Partnerships & Multi-Stakeholder Engagement for Implementation



Mobilizing the \$30B annual investment needed through diverse mechanisms including public-private partnerships, regional financing institutions, and development partners.





ACTION FRAMEWORK AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES



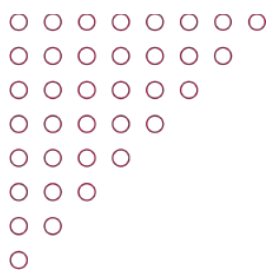
The session featured contributions from Dr. Helen Kezie-Nwoha, Executive Director of Researchers Without Borders and Chairperson of the GIMAC Network; Prof. Boni Dulani, Director of Surveys at Afrobarometer; Mr. Vinesh Chintaram, Chair of the Infrastructure and Energy Cluster of ECOSOCC; and Mr. Tewaney Seifesellassie, Peace, Advocacy and Ethics Department Head and Senior Climate Advisor at AACC/EOC-DICAC (Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development Commission). The discussion was moderated by Ms. Rose Odengo, Journalist and Communication Consultant.

Speakers emphasized that the voice of African citizens must remain central to the implementation of the water and sanitation agenda, noting that the success of the AU Theme of the Year will depend on whether citizens are meaningfully involved in shaping and monitoring policies affecting their lives

The discussion emphasized that effective partnership models must move beyond consultation toward co-creation, ensuring that citizens and grassroots actors are involved in the design, implementation, and monitoring of water and sanitation programs. Such collaborative models can strengthen ownership, improve responsiveness to community needs, and ensure that policies reflect lived realities across the continent.

Another key theme was the need for sustained engagement mechanisms that extend beyond the AU Theme of the Year. Participants emphasized that coordination platforms should be established to ensure continued collaboration, knowledge sharing, and policy dialogue between stakeholders throughout and beyond 2026.





Emerging Issues Identified

- Limited alignment between continental commitments, national frameworks, and community-level realities
- Insufficient mechanisms to ensure citizens' voices inform policy development and implementation
- Weak coordination among civil society, AU institutions, Member States, and development partners
- Limited institutionalized platforms for sustained engagement beyond the AU Theme of the Year
- Persistent financing gaps limiting the scaling of water and sanitation initiatives
- Underutilization of citizen-generated data and research insights in shaping policy responses

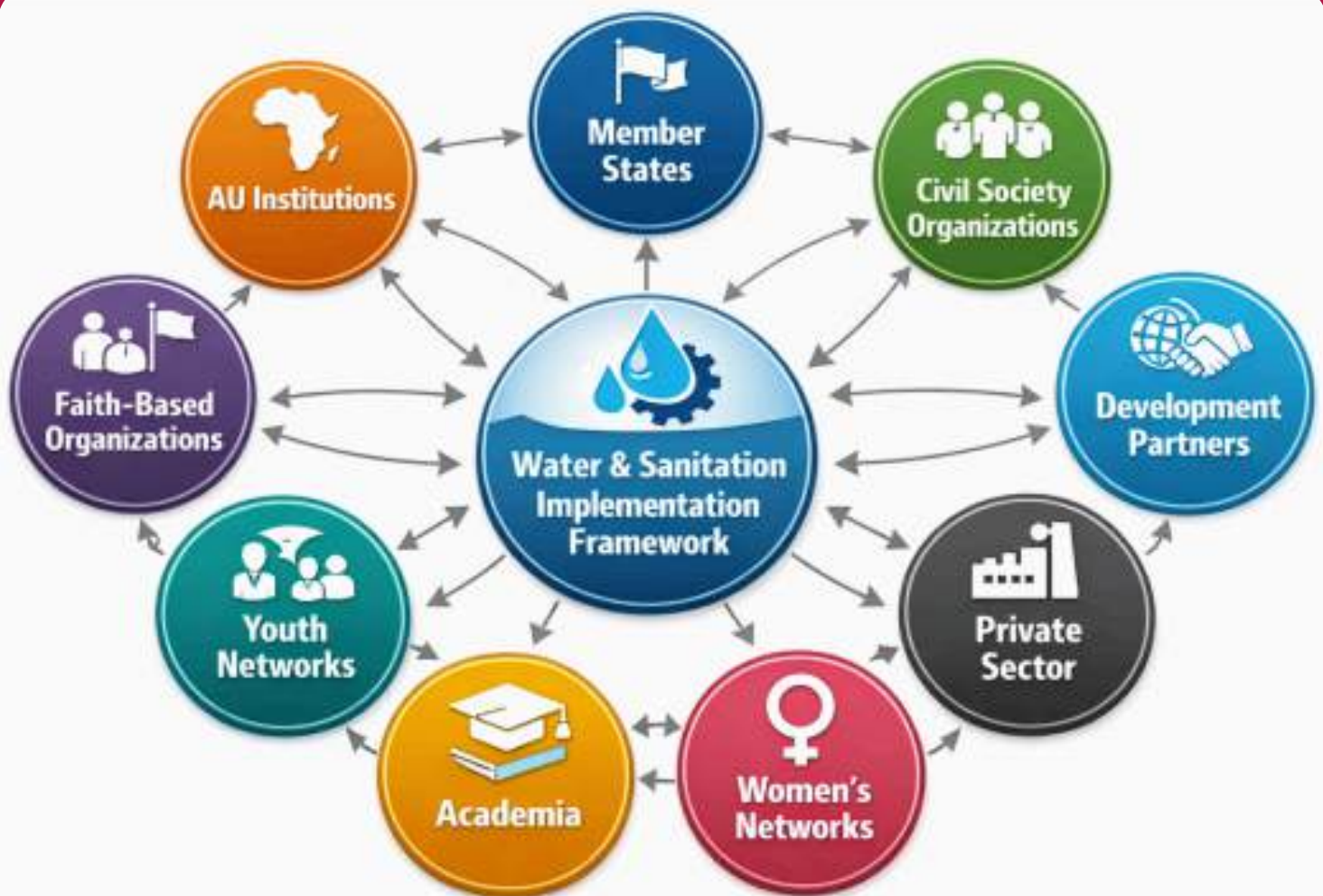
Policy Recommendations

- Strengthen civil society organizations as partners in implementation, transparency, and accountability
- Develop effective partnership and co-creation models bringing together AU institutions, Member States, utilities, and communities
- Establish sustained engagement and coordination platforms for dialogue and knowledge-sharing beyond 2026
- Promote integration of citizen-generated data and research evidence into policy planning and evaluation
- Mobilize resources through innovative financing and strategic partnerships with development partners
- Ensure stronger alignment between continental frameworks, national policies, and local implementation



Multi-Stakeholder Ecosystem

Key actor groups in the water and sanitation implementation framework



Closing Reflections:

Less Talk, More Implementation

The closing session reaffirmed a shared commitment to ensure that the outcomes of the dialogue contribute meaningfully to African Union processes and to the implementation of the 2026 AU Theme of the Year.



ECOSOCC CIVIL SOCIETY PRE-SUMMIT ON THE 2026 AFRICAN UNION THEME OF THE YEAR

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

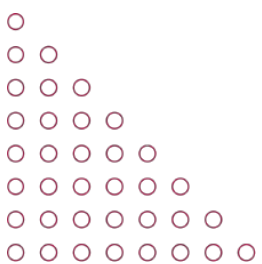


A Collective Commitment to Action

The closing reflections brought together the key messages emerging from the ECOSOCC Civil Society Pre-Summit and reaffirmed a shared commitment to ensure that the 2026 African Union Theme of the Year on “Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems” translates into tangible results for African citizens.

Ambassador William Carew highlighted that the discussions throughout the PreSummit consistently pointed to the need to move beyond fragmented policy conversations toward inclusive, evidence-based, politically supported, and community-based implementation. While Africa has developed numerous strategies and frameworks on water and sanitation, the real challenge lies in turning commitments into concrete actions that deliver measurable impact on the ground.

Speakers reaffirmed that civil society organizations remain essential partners in translating policy into people-centered action — amplifying citizen voices, generating evidence, monitoring implementation, and strengthening transparency and accountability.





“Achieving sustainable water availability and safe sanitation systems across the continent will require stronger regional cooperation, improved data use, innovative financing mechanisms, and trust-building across states and institutions.”

Closing Consensus, ECOSOC
Civil Society Pre-Summit 2026

The Way Forward: Six Commitments

- **Advance evidence-based and inclusive recommendations**
to inform African Union processes related to the 2026 Theme of the Year on water availability and sanitation.
- **Strengthen the integration of women, youth, marginalized communities, and citizen voices**
in water and sanitation planning, policy development, and implementation processes.
- **Promote transboundary water cooperation**
as an agenda for peace, solidarity, and regional integration, rather than solely a technical water management issue.
- **Encourage stronger multi-stakeholder partnerships**
across civil society, private sector actors, faith-based institutions, academia, and governments to deliver on the AU Theme of the Year.
- **Continue engagement**
on the right to sanitation, innovative financing, data governance, and multi-stakeholder accountability as key pillars for implementation.
- **Support practical, community-led and research-informed implementation pathways**
that move the discussion from theory to action.

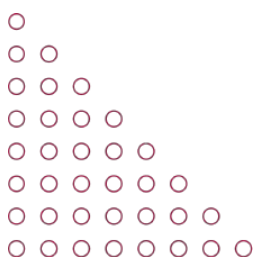


Photo Gallery





African Union ECOSOCC

ECOSOCC Civil Society Pre-Summit event

Date : 9 February 2026

Venue : Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

2026 African Union Theme of the Year:
“Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and
Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the
Goals of Agenda 2063”

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