



RESEARCH REPORT NO. 1 · 2026

Women, Water and Article 15 of the Maputo Protocol

Turning the African Union's 2026 theme on water and sanitation into rights for women and girls in West and Central Africa

4 October 2026

Women Leaders Network for Development (RFLD)

Pan-African feminist network · 1,143 member organisations · 35+ countries

About RFLD

Founded in 2013 by Dossi Sêkonnou Gloria AGUEH, the Women Leaders Network for Development (RFLD) is a pan-African, Afrofeminist network of 1,143 member organisations working in more than 35 African countries on human rights, gender equality, health, development, and peace and security.

RFLD is registered as an International Organisation in Senegal and as a non-governmental organisation in Benin, Ghana, Nigeria and The Gambia. Its Africa Office is in Accra, with Francophone hubs in Dakar and Porto-Novo, an ACHPR liaison office in Banjul, a Nigeria office in Lagos and a member platform office in Igolo.

- **Observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (No. 553)**
- **Co-chair of the SEA-T Programme Advisory Council (BMZ/GIZ)**
- **NGOsource 501(c)(3) Equivalency Determination**
- **Candid Seal of Transparency 2025**
- **DCNÛÈSÈ Data Center: twelve open data tools on women's rights in Africa**

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KEY MESSAGES

- 1 Water is a women's rights issue in Africa. In households without water on the premises, women and girls aged 15 and over are mainly responsible for fetching it in 7 out of 10 cases, and women in sub-Saharan Africa are four times as likely as men to do this work (WHO & UNICEF, 2023).
- 2 Article 15(a) of the Maputo Protocol already obliges States Parties to "provide women with access to clean drinking water". The obligation is binding. What is missing is implementation, budgets and reporting.
- 3 In 2024, only 30.6% of people in Western Africa and 17.7% in Middle Africa used safely managed drinking water. In rural Middle Africa the figure was 2.8% (United Nations Statistics Division, 2025).
- 4 The African Union has made water and sanitation its theme for 2026 and has endorsed the Africa Water Vision 2063. Neither will deliver for women unless they are read together with Article 15 and with the African Commission's Guidelines on the Right to Water.
- 5 In March 2026 the African Commission decided to prepare Guidelines on the Right to Sanitation with a focus on women and girls (ACHPR, 2026a). Civil society has two years to shape them.
- 6 RFLD calls on States to report on Article 15 in every periodic report, to fund women-led water committees, to make water points and sanitation safe from violence, and to publish water budgets that show who benefits.

Executive summary

Across Africa, the walk to the water point is still one of the clearest markers of gender inequality. In 2022, 1.8 billion people worldwide lived in households without water on the premises, and in 7 out of 10 of these households women and girls were the main water collectors (WHO & UNICEF, 2023). Nearly half of the 1.2 billion people in sub-Saharan Africa rely on water that has to be collected, and all 21 countries in the world

where at least a quarter of households depend on women for this task are in sub-Saharan Africa (WHO & UNICEF, 2023, pp. 17–18). The time cost is enormous. UN sources estimate that women and girls spend about 250 million hours a day collecting water (OHCHR, 2025; UNESCO, 2026).

The African human rights system has already given these women a legal claim. Article 15 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) places access to clean drinking water at the heart of the right to food security. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) has built on this through its 2015 resolution on the obligations on the right to water, its 2019 Guidelines on the Right to Water in Africa, and its 2026 decision to draft Guidelines on the Right to Sanitation focused on women and girls (ACHPR, 2015, 2019, 2026a).

The political moment is unusually favourable. The African Union (AU) chose "Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063" as its theme for 2026, and Heads of State endorsed the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy at the February 2026 summit (African Union, 2026a, 2026b). In December 2026, Senegal co-hosts the UN Water Conference with the United Arab Emirates (UN-Water, 2025).

This report shows that the legal framework is far ahead of practice. The six country case studies (Senegal, Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon) find that none of the national water laws reviewed contains a specific provision on women, that sex-disaggregated data on water collection are rare, and that gender budget lines for water, where they exist, are seldom funded. Women hold only 14.86% of seats in water management bodies in Burkina Faso, against a national target of 30% (World Bank, 2024). In Nigeria, the federal water ministry cited a gender budget line, yet there was no evidence that it had been funded (UNICEF Nigeria, 2025b).

Climate change is making the gap wider. Rainfall variability of around 50% above or below average has already had largely negative effects across water-dependent sectors in Africa, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) finds with high confidence that gender-sensitive adaptation reduces vulnerability (Trisos et al., 2022). In the Sahel, displacement has lengthened the distance to water and made the journey more dangerous for women (Birwe, 2025).

The report closes with recommendations to States, the African Commission, the AU and the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW), development partners and civil society, and with an advocacy calendar for 2026 to 2028. Its annex offers a checklist that States can use when they report on Article 15 and that women's organisations can use when they prepare shadow reports.

1. Introduction

1.1 Why this report

RFLD works with 1,143 member organisations in more than 35 African countries. In community meetings from Porto-Novo to Banjul, water comes up in almost every conversation about women's rights, even when the agenda is about something else. Women describe the hours lost each morning, the girls who arrive late at school, the fear of walking to a borehole after dark, and the health centres where midwives deliver babies without running water.

In October 2026 RFLD published a short policy brief on this subject. Members and partners asked for a fuller analysis that could support national advocacy, State reporting and the African Commission's new work on sanitation. This report answers that request. It keeps the core argument of the brief and adds the evidence, country analysis and practical tools that advocates need.



Members of RFLD's network at a regional convening. Women's organisations closest to water points are often furthest from decision-making.

1.2 Purpose and audience

The report has three purposes. It explains what Article 15 of the Maputo Protocol requires of States in relation to water. It documents how far women and girls in West and Central Africa are from enjoying that right. It proposes concrete steps for the period 2026 to 2028, when the AU theme, the UN Water Conference and the African Commission's sanitation guidelines create rare openings for change.

It is written for four groups of readers:

- government officials who prepare State reports to the African Commission or who design water and sanitation policies;
- members of the African Commission and of AU bodies working on water, gender and climate;
- development partners and funders that invest in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH);
- women's rights organisations, community water committees and journalists.

1.3 Scope

The report covers the AU as a whole for the legal analysis and focuses on West and Central Africa for the data and country studies, because this is where most RFLD members work and where access to safely managed water is lowest. It deals with drinking water, sanitation and hygiene as they affect women and girls. It touches on water for agriculture and livelihoods only where this shapes women's access to domestic water.

A note on terms

Safely managed drinking water means water from an improved source that is located on premises, available when needed and free from contamination. **Basic drinking water** means water from an improved source with a collection time of 30 minutes or less for a round trip. These are the categories used by the WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) to track Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6.

National statistics often use other measures, such as the *taux de desserte* in francophone countries, which counts the population covered by water infrastructure. The two kinds of figures cannot be compared directly.

2. Methodology

2.1 Approach

This is a desk-based study. RFLD reviewed legal instruments, official statistics, United Nations and AU documents, peer-reviewed research and national laws and policies published up to 4 October 2026. The research team gave priority to primary sources: the treaty texts, the resolutions of the African Commission, the reports of the JMP and of UN-Water, and the official gazettes or legal databases of the six case-study countries.

2.2 Country selection

The six countries were chosen to reflect the diversity of RFLD's membership and of the legal situation under the Maputo Protocol:

- Senegal, Benin, Ghana and Nigeria, which have ratified the Protocol without reservation and where RFLD has registered offices;
- Cameroon, which has ratified with a general interpretive declaration that the African Commission lists among reservations;
- Niger, which signed the Protocol in 2004 but has not ratified it.

2.3 Sources and verification

Each figure in this report is linked to a source in the reference list, using the author-date style of the American Psychological Association (APA, 7th edition). Regional figures for 2024 come from Table 315 of the United Nations Statistical Yearbook, which reproduces JMP data (United Nations Statistics Division, 2025). Where two credible sources disagree, the report says so. Where RFLD could not confirm an item against a primary source before publication, it is marked "to be confirmed".

2.4 Limitations

The study has four main limits. First, the JMP country files for 2024 could not be consulted directly, so basic water figures for some countries are missing. Second, there is no nationally representative survey in West Africa that measures violence experienced during water collection, so the report relies on regional and global studies. Third, national water laws are sometimes under revision, and the report reflects the texts available on 4 October 2026. Fourth, budget data disaggregated by sex are almost absent from the sector, which limits what

can be said about who benefits from public spending.

3. Women, girls and water: what the data show

3.1 Access to drinking water and sanitation

Africa has made real progress since 2000. Between 2000 and 2020, the continent's population grew from 800 million to 1.3 billion, and 500 million people gained basic drinking water while 290 million gained basic sanitation (UNICEF West and Central Africa, 2022). Yet in 2020, 418 million Africans still lacked basic drinking water, 779 million lacked basic sanitation, including 208 million who practised open defecation, and 839 million lacked basic hygiene. To reach universal coverage by 2030, the JMP calculated that progress on safely managed drinking water would have to be twelve times faster (UNICEF West and Central Africa, 2022).

The latest regional estimates confirm that West and Central Africa are furthest behind. In 2024, safely managed drinking water reached 31.7% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa, with a sharp gap between urban areas (51.6%) and rural areas (16.2%) (United Nations Statistics Division, 2025).

Table 1. Safely managed drinking water and sanitation, 2024 (% of population)

Region	Water, total	Water, urban	Water, rural	Sanitation, total
Sub-Saharan Africa	31.7	51.6	16.2	26.0
Western Africa	30.6	40.6	20.4	26.8
Middle Africa	17.7	31.1	2.8	15.6

Source: United Nations Statistics Division (2025), Statistical Yearbook 68, Table 315, based on WHO/UNICEF JMP data.

The rural figure for Middle Africa deserves attention. Fewer than 3 in every 100 rural residents of Central Africa use safely managed drinking water. For women in these areas, the daily water journey is the norm.

Household surveys tell the same story from the user's side. In Round 9 of the Afrobarometer survey, conducted in 39 countries between 2021 and 2023, 56% of respondents said their household had gone without enough clean water at least once in the previous year, and 24% said this happened many times or always. Only 27% had water piped into their dwelling, and only 38% approved of their government's handling of water and sanitation (Afrobarometer, 2024).

At global level, the UN Women and UN DESA Gender Snapshot estimates that in 2024 more than 1 in 4 women and girls (1.1 billion) lacked safely managed drinking water and more than 2 in 5 (1.7 billion) lacked safely managed sanitation (UN Women & UN DESA, 2025). The same report notes that SDG 6 has no gender-specific indicator in the official framework. This gap matters: what is not measured by sex is rarely planned or funded by sex.

3.2 Who carries the water

The JMP's 2023 report on gender provides the most complete picture of who collects water. In households without water on the premises, women and girls aged 15 and over are the primary collectors in 7 out of 10 cases. Girls under 15 collect water more often than boys of the same age (7% against 4%) (WHO & UNICEF, 2023).

The report adds three findings that are specific to sub-Saharan Africa:

- nearly half (45%) of the region's 1.2 billion people rely on collected water;
- women are four times as likely as men to fetch water;
- all 21 countries where at least a quarter of households rely on women to collect water are in the region, and in Chad and Togo, among others, more than half of households rely on women (WHO & UNICEF, 2023, pp. 17–18).

An earlier study of 24 sub-Saharan countries found that about 17 million women and children spent more than 30 minutes a day collecting water. Adult women were the main collectors in every country studied, with shares ranging from 46% in Liberia to 90% in Côte d'Ivoire. Among children who collected water, 62% were girls (Graham et al., 2016).

National data confirm the pattern. In Nigeria, the 2021 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey found that 40% of women and girls aged 15 and over were the main collectors of drinking water, against 30% of men and boys (UNICEF Nigeria, 2025a). In Senegal's Groundnut Basin, 88% of adult women collect water, according to a World Bank appraisal (World Bank, 2018).

“Women and girls spend an estimated 250 million hours a day collecting water.” (OHCHR, 2025)

The time cost is large. In 2016, UNICEF estimated that women and girls spent 200 million hours a day collecting water worldwide, and that in sub-Saharan Africa a single round trip took on average 33 minutes in rural areas and 25 minutes in urban areas (UNICEF, 2016). The more recent estimate of 250 million hours a day appears in both the UN World Water Development Report 2026 and the input of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to the 2026 UN Water Conference (OHCHR, 2025; UNESCO, 2026). Every hour spent on water is an hour taken from school, paid work, rest or political participation.



Women at RFLD community convenings. Time spent on water collection is time taken from education, income and participation.

3.3 Schools and menstrual health

Water and sanitation in schools shape whether adolescent girls stay in education. In 2023, only 45% of schools in sub-Saharan Africa had basic drinking water, the lowest share of any SDG region. Half had basic sanitation and 37% had basic hygiene, against global averages of 77%, 78% and 67% (WHO & UNICEF, 2024).

Menstrual health is where the gap is widest. In sub-Saharan Africa, only 1 in 10 schools (11%) has bins for menstrual waste and only 1 in 8 (12%) provides menstrual materials. Globally, only 39% of schools provide menstrual health education (UNICEF, 2024). The JMP reports that about 10 million girls aged 15 to 19 in 41

countries missed school, work or social activities during their last period (UNESCO, 2026).

Country data show both the scale of the problem and the policy options. In Niger, 22.7% of schools have drinking water and 26.7% have sanitation facilities, and UNICEF notes that school-age girls lack adequate menstrual hygiene services (UNICEF Niger, n.d.). In Nigeria, only 16% of schools and 6% of health care facilities had basic WASH services in 2021 (UNICEF Nigeria, 2025a). Ghana has taken a different path: its 2025 budget allocated GH¢292.4 million for free sanitary pads for schoolgirls from Primary 5 to Senior High School, and the programme was launched on 24 April 2025 (Ghana News Agency, 2025; Graphic Online, 2025).

The regional symposium on menstrual health

In May 2021, UNICEF and UNFPA convened a symposium on menstrual health and hygiene in West and Central Africa with more than 1,000 participants from 91 countries. It found that fewer than half of the region's population had basic WASH services and that about USD 36.5 million had been invested in menstrual health in the region since 2012 (UNICEF & UNFPA, 2021).

The symposium highlighted national steps: Senegal set up an inter-ministerial platform on menstrual health under its water ministry, Côte d'Ivoire adopted a national reference guide in 2019, and Niger included menstrual health indicators in its WASH sector programme for 2016 to 2030.

A caution is needed. The claim that “1 in 10 African girls miss school because of menstruation” is often repeated but has no traceable data source, according to fact-checkers. RFLD does not use it.

3.4 Health care facilities

Water in health facilities is a condition for safe childbirth. In 2023, UNICEF and WHO reported that only half of health care facilities in sub-Saharan Africa had a water source on site, in a region that accounts for about 43% of newborn deaths worldwide (UNICEF, 2023). A new JMP report on WASH in health care facilities for 2015 to 2025 was published on 18 August 2026 (WHO & UNICEF, 2026). Its regional figures were being verified at the time of writing and will be added to the next edition of this report.

For women, the absence of water in maternity wards means higher risks of infection for themselves and their newborns, and heavier work for midwives and nurses, most of whom are women. This links Article 15 directly to Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol on health and reproductive rights.

3.5 Safety, violence and dignity

The journey to the water point and the use of shared toilets expose women and girls to harassment and violence. A global review of 18 peer-reviewed studies, 13 of them from sub-Saharan Africa, found that the most common link was an increased risk of sexual and physical violence for women who walked long distances to access water. The review also found links between household water shortages and intimate partner violence (Tallman et al., 2023).



Health and water are inseparable for women: safe childbirth depends on water in maternity wards. RFLD convening.

The best quantified African study comes from rural Mpumalanga in South Africa. Among 1,870 young women aged 13 to 20, 25.9% reported having experienced violence while collecting water or using toilets, 29.0% worried about such violence and 4.0% had experienced sexual violence while collecting water (Jayaweera et al., 2023).

In 2016 the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation described violence “at places to collect water, bathe and wash clothes” and called on States to adopt transformative approaches that address both women’s practical needs and the stereotypes behind unpaid care work (Special Rapporteur, 2016). A 2026 policy brief by Sanitation and Water for All describes “sextortion related to water”, in which officials or vendors demand sexual favours in exchange for access, as a form of corruption that particularly affects women (SWA & ISF-UTS, 2026).

In the Sahel, insecurity and displacement have made these risks more acute. Women in Ayorou in Niger report that the growing distance to water sources has harmed their health, and in Dori in Burkina Faso fetching water and firewood has become considerably more hazardous (Birwe, 2025).

A research gap that must be closed

RFLD found no nationally representative survey in West Africa that measures violence experienced during water collection. Demographic and Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys could add a short module on safety at water points and sanitation facilities. Until they do, policy will continue to be designed without evidence on one of the most serious risks women face.

3.6 What the data do not show

The available data have four blind spots that weaken policy:

- most national water statistics are reported by household, not by individual, so they hide who in the household carries the burden;
- there is no gender-specific indicator under SDG 6;
- sex-disaggregated data on water governance and WASH employment are scarce;

- women with disabilities, older women, displaced women and women in informal settlements are almost invisible in WASH statistics.

The World Water Development Report 2026 shows what disaggregated data can reveal: fewer than one in five water workers worldwide are women, and they are paid less than men; women hold fewer than half of government WASH posts in 79 of 109 countries; and a 1°C rise in temperature reduces the incomes of female-headed households 34% more than those of male-headed households (UNESCO, 2026).

4. The legal framework

4.1 Article 15 of the Maputo Protocol

The Maputo Protocol was adopted on 11 July 2003 and entered into force in 2005. Article 15, on the right to food security, reads:

Article 15: Right to Food Security

States Parties shall ensure that women have the right to nutritious and adequate food. In this regard, they shall take appropriate measures to:

- a) provide women with access to clean drinking water, sources of domestic fuel, land, and the means of producing nutritious food;
- b) establish adequate systems of supply and storage to ensure food security.

Four features of this text are important for advocacy.

It creates a right held by women. The Article does not speak of households or communities in general. It states that women have the right, and it places the duty on States Parties to “ensure” it.

It links water to food and livelihoods. By placing clean drinking water alongside domestic fuel, land and the means of producing food, Article 15 recognises that water insecurity, energy poverty and land insecurity form a single burden for rural women. Policies that treat them separately miss how women actually live.

It requires “appropriate measures”. This is an obligation of conduct that States must be able to demonstrate. Under Article 26(1), States must report on these measures in their periodic reports to the African Commission, and under Article 26(2) they must provide budgetary and other resources for the full and effective implementation of the rights recognised in the Protocol (African Union, 2003).

No State has a reservation on Article 15. According to the African Commission’s 2026 Advocacy Framework, nine AU Member States have lodged reservations or interpretive declarations to the Protocol, and none of them concerns Article 15 (ACHPR, 2026b). The obligation therefore applies in full in every State Party.

4.2 Related provisions of the Protocol

Article 15 should be read with other provisions of the Protocol that strengthen women’s claims in relation to water:

- **Article 14(2)(a)** requires States to provide adequate, affordable and accessible health services, especially to women in rural areas. Water in health facilities is a condition for these services.
- **Article 18** recognises women’s right to live in a healthy and sustainable environment and requires States to

ensure greater participation of women in the planning, management and preservation of the environment and the sustainable use of natural resources at all levels.

- **Article 19** on sustainable development requires States to introduce a gender perspective in national development planning, to ensure women's participation at all levels in development policies and programmes, and to promote women's access to and control over productive resources such as land.
- **Article 24** requires special protection for poor women, women heads of families and women from marginalised population groups.
- **Article 4** on the rights to life, integrity and security of the person supports measures to prevent violence at water points and sanitation facilities.

4.3 Instruments of the African Commission

The African Commission has developed the content of the right to water through several instruments.

Resolution 300 (2015). At its 17th Extraordinary Session in February 2015, the Commission adopted a resolution on the obligations on the right to water. It recalls Article 15 of the Maputo Protocol and calls on States to consider the needs of vulnerable persons, in particular women and children (ACHPR, 2015).

Guidelines on the Right to Water in Africa (2019). Adopted at the 26th Extraordinary Session in July 2019, the Guidelines set out detailed State obligations. Guideline 22.1 requires States to take action to reduce the disproportionate burden and amount of time women bear in water collection. Guideline 22.2 requires them to guarantee safe access to water for women and girls at any time of the day. Guideline 21.2 calls for separate school sanitation for girls and boys, and the preface recognises water for menstrual hygiene as a necessary precondition for the right to education of women and girls (ACHPR, 2019).

Resolution 658 (2026). At its 86th Ordinary Session in March 2026, the Commission tasked its Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa and its Working Group on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to develop, within two years, Guidelines on the Right to Sanitation in Africa with a specific focus on women and girls. The resolution recalls Articles 2, 3, 4, 12, 14, 15, 16 and 18 of the Maputo Protocol and notes that the gender-specific provisions of the 2019 guidelines "require further elaboration" (ACHPR, 2026a).

General Comments. The Commission's General Comment No. 2 on Article 14 (2014) does not deal with water or sanitation, and there is no General Comment on Article 15 (ACHPR, 2014). General Comment No. 6 on Article 7(d) (2020), on property rights at the end of a marriage, is relevant to women's control over land and assets linked to water (ACHPR, 2020). A General Comment on Article 15 would give States and civil society an authoritative interpretation of the water obligation.

An opening for civil society

Resolution 658 gives women's organisations a concrete process to join between 2026 and 2028. RFLD will submit inputs and invites its members to document sanitation and safety at water points in their communities, using the checklist in the annex to this report.

4.4 Other African instruments

- **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981):** Article 16 on the right to health, Article 22 on development and Article 24 on a satisfactory environment.
- **African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990):** Article 14(2)(c) requires States to ensure the provision of adequate nutrition and safe drinking water. The African Committee of Experts on the Rights

and Welfare of the Child chose universal access to WASH for every child as the theme of the Day of the African Child 2026 (ACERWC, 2026).

- **Principles and Guidelines on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:** the Commission's guidelines include a section on the right to water and sanitation, grounded in Articles 4, 5, 15, 16, 22 and 24 of the African Charter (ACHPR, n.d.).

4.5 The United Nations framework

The African standards are reinforced by the UN human rights system:

- **UN General Assembly Resolution 64/292 (2010)** recognises the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights (UN General Assembly, 2010).
- **Resolution 70/169 (2015)** recognises water and sanitation as distinct rights and refers to women's exposure to gender-based violence, menstrual stigma and the need for equal participation in decision-making.
- **Human Rights Council resolutions 15/9 (2010), 33/10 (2016) and 57/13 (2024)** confirm and develop these rights (OHCHR, 2025).
- **CEDAW Article 14(2)(h)** guarantees rural women the right to enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply.
- **CESCR General Comment No. 15 (2002)** on the right to water sets out the core content of availability, quality and accessibility (to be confirmed against the treaty body database for verbatim quotes).
- **The 2016 report of the Special Rapporteur (A/HRC/33/49)** on gender equality in the realisation of the rights to water and sanitation is the key doctrinal text to read with Article 15.

Table 2. Key instruments and what they require on women and water

Instrument	What it requires
Maputo Protocol, Art. 15(a)	Access for women to clean drinking water, domestic fuel, land and the means of producing food
Maputo Protocol, Art. 26	Reporting on measures taken and budgetary resources for implementation
ACHPR Guidelines on the Right to Water (2019), 22.1 and 22.2	Reduce women's time burden; safe access for women and girls at any time of day
ACHPR Res. 658 (2026)	Guidelines on the Right to Sanitation focused on women and girls, within two years
African Children's Charter, Art. 14(2)(c)	Adequate nutrition and safe drinking water for children
CEDAW, Art. 14(2)(h)	Adequate living conditions for rural women, including water supply
UNGA Res. 64/292 (2010) and 70/169 (2015)	Recognition of the human rights to water and sanitation
SDG 6.1, 6.2 and 6.b	Universal access, attention to women and girls, community participation

Sources: African Union (2003); ACHPR (2019, 2026a); OAU (1990); UN General Assembly (2010); UN DESA (n.d.).

4.6 AU policy in 2026

The AU launched its theme for 2026, “Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems to Achieve the Goals of Agenda 2063”, at the 39th Ordinary Session of the Assembly in Addis Ababa in February 2026 (African Union, 2026a). The theme sets eight objectives, including the endorsement of the Africa Water Vision 2063.

The **Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy** was adopted by the AMCOW Governing Council in Dakar on 29 September 2025 and endorsed by Heads of State on 15 February 2026 (AMCOW, 2025; African Union, 2026b). Its vision is “a water-secure and resilient Africa with safe sanitation for all”. It notes that only about half of Africa’s population has access to safe water and that just 45% has basic sanitation and hygiene services. One of its milestones for 2033 is that 40% of Member States adopt gender-balanced sanitation governance protocols (AU & AMCOW, 2026). The AU press release cites an annual investment gap of USD 30 billion.

On World Water Day 2026, whose global theme was water and gender, the Chairperson of the AU Commission wrote that millions of Africans, disproportionately women and girls in rural communities, still walk long distances each day to collect water instead of attending school (Youssouf, 2026).

Two other continental frameworks matter. The **African Sanitation Policy Guidelines**, launched by AMCOW in June 2021, guide governments in developing comprehensive sanitation policies (AMCOW, 2021). The **Continental Africa Water Investment Programme (AIP)**, endorsed by the AU Assembly in 2021, aims to mobilise USD 30 billion a year in water investment by 2030 and includes a gender window, WACDEP-G (AUDA-NEPAD, n.d.; Africa Water Investment Programme, n.d.).



Advocacy on the 2026 AU theme must bring women’s voices into the rooms where water investments are decided. RFLD convening.

4.7 SDG 6 and the missing gender indicator

SDG target 6.1 calls for universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water by 2030. Target 6.2 calls for access to adequate sanitation and hygiene, “paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations”. Target 6.b supports the participation of local communities in water and sanitation management (UN DESA, n.d.).

The gender element of indicator 6.5.1 on integrated water resources management rose from 54% in 2020 to 58% in 2023. Yet 15% of countries had no gender mainstreaming mechanism at all, and only 27% reported

mostly achieving their gender objectives (UN Women, 2025). The Gender Snapshot points out that the official SDG 6 framework has no gender-specific indicator (UN Women & UN DESA, 2025). African States and the AU could close this gap regionally by adding sex-disaggregated indicators to the monitoring framework of the Africa Water Vision 2063.

5. Climate change, water and women

5.1 A changing water cycle

West and Central Africa are among the regions most exposed to climate change. Temperatures in West Africa have risen by 1 to 3°C since the mid-1970s, with the largest increases in the Sahara and the Sahel. The region has become wetter since the mid-1990s, but with fewer and more intense rainfall events, and rainfall is projected to decrease in the west of the region and increase in the east (CDKN, 2022).

The IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report finds that recent extreme variability in rainfall and river discharge, of around 50% above or below the average, has had largely negative impacts across water-dependent sectors in Africa (high confidence). Projections of the number of people exposed to water stress by the 2050s vary widely between models (Trisos et al., 2022). Worldwide, roughly half of the population experiences severe water scarcity for at least part of the year, and water hazards disproportionately affect poor people, women, children, Indigenous Peoples and older people, especially in the Global South (Caretta et al., 2022).

Drought is the deadliest of these hazards. Between 1970 and 2019, drought accounted for 7% of disaster events but 34% of disaster deaths, mostly in Africa (Caretta et al., 2022). The World Meteorological Organization estimated in 2022 that high water stress affects about 250 million people in Africa and that four in five African countries are unlikely to manage their water resources sustainably by 2030 (WMO, 2022).

5.2 What it means for women

Climate change makes the journey to water longer and more dangerous. When wells dry up, women walk further, and when floods contaminate sources, it is mostly women who care for those who fall ill. The IPCC notes that climate variability and change undermine educational attainment and that literacy rates average 12.8% lower for women than men across the 33 African countries assessed (Trisos et al., 2022).

Gender and livelihood interact. A study of husband and wife pairs in Burkina Faso found that women crop farmers reported more water insecurity than their husbands, while among herders men reported more, because they water the livestock (Ilboudo Nébié et al., 2024, as reported by Arizona State University News, 2024). Policies must therefore look at who uses water for what, not only at whether a household has access.

The Lake Chad basin shows how environmental change and conflict combine. The lake shrank from about 25,000 km² in 1963 to less than 1,500 km² by 2001, a historical decline of about 90%. Some 30 million people live in the basin, and fish production fell by about 60% (FAO, n.d.-a). Recent studies suggest that the lake has partly stabilised, but the basin remains one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises, with women and girls bearing the heaviest burden of displacement.

Coastal West Africa faces a different threat. In 2017, coastal degradation from erosion, flooding and pollution cost Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Togo USD 3.8 billion, or 5.3% of their combined gross domestic product, and caused more than 13,000 deaths. On average, 56% of their coastline is eroding by 1.8 metres a year (World Bank, 2019b). Salt water intrusion into coastal aquifers threatens drinking water for communities where women manage household supply.

5.3 Adaptation that works for women

The IPCC finds with high confidence that gender-sensitive and equity-based adaptation reduces vulnerability for marginalised groups in Africa across water, health, food systems and livelihoods. It also finds that water-sensitive planning, including rainwater harvesting and water re-use, can reduce drought and flood risk while improving water and sanitation access (Trisos et al., 2022).

Adaptation finance is far from sufficient. Annual adaptation finance flows to Africa are billions of US dollars below the lowest estimates of adaptation costs (IPCC, 2022). The UN-Water GLAAS 2025 survey found that 80% of countries integrate climate into their WASH policies, but only 20% finance measures for vulnerable populations and only 42% monitor progress (WHO, 2026; Smart Water Magazine, 2026). The SWA and ISF-UTS policy brief recommends giving women-led organisations direct access to climate finance (SWA & ISF-UTS, 2026).



Women's organisations are already leading local adaptation. Climate finance should reach them directly. RFLD convening.

6. Women in water governance

6.1 Present but not in charge

Article 18 of the Maputo Protocol requires States to ensure greater participation of women in the management of natural resources “at all levels”, and the Africa Water Vision 2063 commits to gender-balanced sanitation governance. Yet women remain a minority in the institutions that decide where boreholes are drilled, how tariffs are set and which communities are served first.

The evidence from the region is limited but consistent:

- In **Burkina Faso**, women hold 14.86% of seats in water management bodies, against a national target of 30%. The average across 18 implementing structures is 13.27%, and the World Bank notes that women have little say in decisions on water and agriculture planning (World Bank, 2024).
- In **Nigeria**, women hold about 5% of state Commissioner of Water Resources posts and 6% of Local Government chair posts. Women make up 16% to 26% of staff in state ministries, departments and agencies. WASH committee quotas exist in some agencies, but women's roles remain “peripheral or

unpaid” (UNICEF Nigeria, 2025b).

- In **Ghana**, the National Water Policy of 2007 states that women must be seen as water managers and decision-makers, not only as users, but it sets no numerical quota (Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing, 2007). Research in Wa West District shows women shaping the rules of community water teams, for example by proposing a ban on child pump operators (Abubakari, 2025).

Globally, women make up about 18% of workers in water utilities, and 32% of utilities surveyed by the World Bank had no women engineers (World Bank, 2019a). In almost a quarter of countries, women hold less than 10% of government WASH jobs (WHO, 2022).

6.2 From presence to power

A study of local governance in Senegal’s coastal fisheries offers a useful analogy. In Bargny, women held 29.47% of seats on decision-making bodies but only 9.17% of strategic posts. The authors describe “a systematic gap between presence and power” (Le Soleil, 2026). Water committees show the same pattern: women are often treasurers or members, rarely presidents, and seldom present at the district or national levels where budgets are allocated.

Quota models exist elsewhere. Vanuatu requires 40% women on all local water committees as a condition of registration, and Morocco’s draft water law provides for women’s representation on its High Council for Water and Climate (UN Women, 2025). African States could adopt similar rules and attach them to public funding.

What works for women’s leadership in water

- Binding quotas of at least 40% for women on community, municipal and basin water committees, with a rotation of leadership posts.
- Training and stipends for women members, so that participation is not another unpaid burden.
- Women’s seats in national water regulators and in the delegations that negotiate water investments.
- Publication of committee membership by sex every year.

7. Financing water for women

7.1 A sector short of money

The UN-Water GLAAS 2025 survey, which covered 105 countries and territories, found that fewer than 13% of countries have sufficient financial and human resources for WASH. Among 20 countries with costed data, the gap between needs and available funding was 46%. Non-revenue water, lost through leaks or unbilled use, averaged 39% (WHO, 2026; Smart Water Magazine, 2026). The earlier GLAAS 2022 survey found that more than 75% of countries reported insufficient funding for their WASH plans (WHO, 2022).

At continental level, the AIP targets USD 30 billion a year in water investment by 2030, and the WACDEP-G window aims to influence USD 1 billion in gender-equal and climate-resilient investments over six years, with pilot countries that include Benin and Cameroon (Africa Water Investment Programme, n.d.).

7.2 Where the gender budget is missing

Article 26(2) of the Maputo Protocol requires States to provide budgetary resources for the rights it recognises. In practice, gender budget lines in the water sector are rare and often unfunded:

- In **Nigeria**, only the Federal Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation cited a gender budget line, and it lacked evidence that the line had been funded. Half of respondents said gender funds were insufficient (UNICEF Nigeria, 2025b).
- In **Cameroon**, the National Water Compact for 2026 to 2030 costs USD 4.54 billion, of which about 43% is already mobilisable. It commits to sex-disaggregated data and women's involvement at all levels but does not set a gender budget line (to be confirmed) (République du Cameroun & World Bank, 2026).
- In **Ghana**, the 2025 allocation of GH¢292.4 million for free sanitary pads shows that targeted spending for girls is possible when there is political will (Graphic Online, 2025).

RFLD found no WASH-specific gender budget tracker covering West African countries. This is a practical gap that civil society and parliaments could fill.

Proposal: a WASH gender marker in State reports

States should include in their periodic reports under Article 26 of the Maputo Protocol a simple marker showing the share of the water and sanitation budget that targets women's and girls' specific needs: water points closer to homes, school sanitation with menstrual facilities, water in maternity wards, safety measures and support to women's committees.

8. Country case studies

The six case studies below follow the same structure: the status of the Maputo Protocol, access to water and sanitation, the legal framework, and one programme or policy that involves women. Access figures for 2024 come from the United Nations Statistical Yearbook (United Nations Statistics Division, 2025) unless stated otherwise. Ratification dates come from the AU status list (African Union, 2023) and reservation status from the African Commission's 2026 Advocacy Framework (ACHPR, 2026b).

Table 3. Overview of the six countries

Country	Maputo Protocol	Safely managed water, 2024	Safely managed sanitation, 2024	Water law and gender
Senegal	Ratified 2004, no reservation	27.2%	30.1%	Code de l'eau 1981 (revision announced) and Sanitation Code 2009; no gender provision
Benin	Ratified 2005, no reservation	17.7%	16.4%	Law 2010-44; no gender provision
Ghana	Ratified 2007, no reservation	42.9%	18.8%	National Water Policy 2007 recognises women as decision-makers; no quota
Nigeria	Ratified 2004, no reservation	29.9%	32.2%	Water Resources Act 1993; national bill stalled

Country	Maputo Protocol	Safely managed water, 2024	Safely managed sanitation, 2024	Water law and gender
Niger	Signed 2004, not ratified	No estimate	9.1%	Code de l'eau 2010; no gender provision
Cameroon	Ratified 2012, interpretive declaration	9% (2021)	25.6% (2021)	Law 98/005; no gender provision

Sources: United Nations Statistics Division (2025); République du Cameroun & World Bank (2026) for Cameroon; African Union (2023); ACHPR (2026b).

8.1 Senegal

Maputo Protocol. Senegal signed the Protocol on 26 December 2003 and ratified it on 27 December 2004, without reservation.

Access. In 2024, 27.2% of the population used safely managed drinking water (41.1% in urban areas, 13.2% in rural areas) and 30.1% used safely managed sanitation. In the Groundnut Basin, 88% of adult women collect water (World Bank, 2018).

Legal framework. The Code de l'eau still dates from Law 81-13 of 4 March 1981. At the Council of Ministers of 19 February 2025, the President of the Republic called for the finalisation of a new draft Code de l'eau and announced an independent water regulator (VivAfrik, 2025). In October 2026, the Prime Minister's office still published Law 81-13 as the Code de l'eau, which contains no provision on women or a right to water (Primature du Sénégal, n.d.). The Sanitation Code (Law 2009-24 of 8 July 2009) regulates wastewater, excreta and stormwater, but it does not mention women, girls or menstrual health (République du Sénégal, 2009). The Environmental Code of 2023 deals with water pollution but contains no right to water and no gender provision. The Constitution does not explicitly recognise a right to water.

Women in programmes. The World Bank Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project (2018 to 2023, about USD 130 million) served 1.5 million people, more than half of them women. It encouraged women's participation in choosing the location of household connections and standpipes, tracked female users' satisfaction and required toilet designs that assure women's and girls' privacy and security (World Bank, 2018).

Global role. Senegal co-hosts the 2026 UN Water Conference with the United Arab Emirates (2 to 4 December 2026) and hosted the high-level preparatory meeting in Dakar in January 2026, where the GLAAS 2025 report was launched (UN DESA, 2026; UN-Water, 2025). This gives Senegal a platform to champion women's rights to water in global negotiations.

Priority for advocacy: include a specific chapter on women and girls in the new Code de l'eau, with quotas for women in water user associations and a duty to report sex-disaggregated data.

8.2 Benin

Maputo Protocol. Benin signed on 11 February 2004 and ratified on 30 September 2005, without reservation.

Access. In 2024, 17.7% of the population used safely managed drinking water (28.4% urban, 6.7% rural) and 16.4% used safely managed sanitation. The national rural coverage rate, which measures infrastructure rather than service quality, stood at 82.1% at the end of 2024, but the national agency reported that 26.8% of rural systems were out of service and published no sex-disaggregated data (ANAEPMR, 2025).

Legal framework. Law 2010-44 of 24 November 2010 on water management states in Article 6 that every

Beninese citizen has the right to water for their needs (République du Bénin, 2010). The law contains no provision on women or gender. The Constitution of 1990, as revised in 2019, does not explicitly recognise a right to water.

Women in programmes. Benin is one of five pilot countries of WACDEP-G, the gender window of the Africa Water Investment Programme, alongside Cameroon, Tunisia, Uganda and Zambia. The programme has a budget of €25.6 million over six years (Africa Water Investment Programme, n.d.).

Priority for advocacy: use the gap between the 82.1% infrastructure coverage rate and the 6.7% rural safely managed rate to call for service quality indicators and sex-disaggregated reporting in national water statistics.



RFLD members in Benin and the sub-region bring community evidence on water into national policy dialogues.

8.3 Ghana

Maputo Protocol. Ghana signed on 31 October 2003 and ratified on 13 June 2007, without reservation.

Access. In 2024, 42.9% of the population used safely managed drinking water (60.2% urban, 17.2% rural) and 18.8% used safely managed sanitation. In 2020, basic drinking water reached 86% of the population, but with wide gaps: 96% in urban areas against 72% in rural areas, 99% for the richest against 48% for the poorest, and 98% in Greater Accra against 44% in Upper East. Water was on the premises for only 41% of people (UN-Water, 2023).

Legal framework. Ghana's National Water Policy of 2007 is one of the few in the region to address women explicitly. It states that women must be seen not only as beneficiaries and water users but also as water and waste managers and decision-makers, and it calls for accelerating the representation of women at all levels. It does not set a numerical target (Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing, 2007). The Constitution does not explicitly recognise a right to water (to be confirmed).

Women in programmes. The free sanitary pad programme launched in April 2025, with GH¢292.4 million in the 2025 budget, is a regional benchmark for menstrual health policy (Graphic Online, 2025; Ghana News Agency, 2025). Community research also shows women shaping the rules of rural water and sanitation management teams (Abubakari, 2025).

Priority for advocacy: update the 2007 policy with a numerical target for women in water governance and extend the sanitary pad programme with water and private toilets in every school.

8.4 Nigeria

Maputo Protocol. Nigeria signed on 16 December 2003 and ratified on 16 December 2004, without reservation.

Access. In 2024, 29.9% of the population used safely managed drinking water (36.0% urban, 22.4% rural) and 32.2% used safely managed sanitation. The national WASH survey of 2021 found that only 11% of the population had complete basic WASH services and that 47 million people practised open defecation (UNICEF Nigeria, 2025a).

Legal framework. The Water Resources Act of 1993 remains in force. A National Water Resources Bill has failed in several National Assemblies, partly because State governors oppose the transfer of control over surface and ground water to the Federal Government (Nigerian Tribune, 2022). Its status in the current Assembly is to be confirmed. UNICEF's 2025 gender landscape analysis lists a National Gender Policy (2021) and a Water Resources Gender Mainstreaming Policy (2022), but finds that gender priorities are "absent from core WASH sector policies" (UNICEF Nigeria, 2025b).

Women in programmes. The Clean Nigeria: Use the Toilet campaign, launched in 2019, aimed to end open defecation by 2025. By its fifth anniversary, 135 of 774 Local Government Areas and more than 30,000 communities had been certified open defecation free, and the Minister acknowledged challenges in meeting the target (Voice of Nigeria, 2024). The campaign's gender scores in the UNICEF analysis were low, at 1.0 to 2.1 on a scale of 3.

Priority for advocacy: fund the gender budget line of the federal water ministry, publish its execution, and give women real decision-making roles in WASH committees.

8.5 Niger

Maputo Protocol. Niger signed the Protocol on 6 July 2004 but has not ratified it. It is one of nine AU Member States outside the Protocol (ACHPR, 2026b).

Access. In 2024, 9.1% of the population used safely managed sanitation (24.4% urban, 6.0% rural). No national estimate of safely managed drinking water was available. In schools, 22.7% have drinking water and 26.7% have sanitation facilities (UNICEF Niger, n.d.).

Legal framework. Ordinance 2010-09 of 1 April 2010 established the Code de l'eau (République du Niger, 2010). Article 12 of the 2010 Constitution recognised the right to potable water (FAO, n.d.-b). That Constitution was suspended after the July 2023 coup, and the Charte de la Refondation promulgated in March 2025 now applies (Les Échos du Niger, 2025). Whether the Charter retains a right to water is to be confirmed.

Women in programmes. Niger's WASH sector programme for 2016 to 2030 (ProSEHA) includes two national indicators on menstrual hygiene, one for schools and one for health facilities (UNICEF & UNFPA, 2021).

Priority for advocacy: ratification of the Maputo Protocol, and protection of the constitutional right to water in the transition texts.

8.6 Cameroon

Maputo Protocol. Cameroon signed on 25 July 2006 and ratified on 13 September 2012. It lodged a general interpretive declaration concerning ethical and moral values, which the African Commission lists among reservations (ACHPR, 2026b). The declaration does not concern Article 15.

Access. Cameroon's National Water Compact for 2026 to 2030 reports 77% access to an improved water source in 2025, but only 9% safely managed water in 2021. In 2021, 25.6% of the population used safely managed sanitation. The Compact targets 90% water access and 30% safely managed sanitation by 2030, at a total cost of 2,575 billion FCFA (USD 4.54 billion) (République du Cameroun & World Bank, 2026).

Legal framework. Law 98/005 of 14 April 1998 on the water regime states in Article 2(1) that water is part of the common heritage of the Nation and that the State facilitates access to it for all (République du Cameroun, 1998). The law contains no gender provision, and the Compact commits to revising it.

Women in programmes. The Compact commits to women's involvement at all levels, sex-disaggregated data and capacity building for women in decision-making bodies. Between 2022 and 2025, UNICEF-supported work provided sanitation in 109 public schools and WASH infrastructure in 48 health facilities, and 3,457 women and adolescent girls received menstrual hygiene guidance (UNICEF Cameroon, 2026). Cameroon is also a WACDEP-G pilot country.

Priority for advocacy: use the revision of the 1998 water law to introduce a gender chapter, and include Article 15 in Cameroon's next report to the African Commission.

8.7 Lessons across the six countries

Read together, the six cases point to five lessons:

1. **No water law reviewed contains a gender provision.** Women appear in policies and project documents, but not in the binding legal texts that define rights and duties.
2. **Constitutional recognition is rare and fragile.** Niger's constitutional right to water was lost with the suspension of the Constitution.
3. **National statistics hide the rural and gender gap.** Benin's 82.1% infrastructure coverage rate and Cameroon's 77% improved-source figure contrast sharply with safely managed rates below 10% in rural areas.
4. **Women are present in committees but absent from power.** Quotas, where they exist, are not met.
5. **Gender budgets are announced but seldom funded.** Ghana's sanitary pad allocation stands out as a funded commitment.

Other countries in the region show similar patterns. In 2024, safely managed drinking water reached 36.4% in Côte d'Ivoire, 20.5% in Togo and only 6.3% in Chad, which has not ratified the Maputo Protocol (United Nations Statistics Division, 2025).

9. The implementation gap

The previous chapters show a clear pattern. The African legal framework on women and water is strong and getting stronger. The data on women's daily reality show slow progress, with West and Central Africa furthest behind. Between the two lies an implementation gap with five dimensions.

9.1 A reporting gap

Article 26 of the Maputo Protocol requires States to report on the measures they take. In practice, State reports rarely mention Article 15, and when they do, they describe food or agricultural programmes without reference to water. The African Commission's concluding observations seldom address women's access to water specifically. Without reporting, there is no accountability.

9.2 A legal gap

National water laws in the six countries reviewed do not contain gender provisions. Most do not recognise a right to water, and none sets quotas for women in water governance. Article 15 has not been translated into domestic law.



Closing the implementation gap requires the participation of the women who live with water insecurity every day. RFLD convening.

9.3 A data gap

Household-level statistics hide who collects water. SDG 6 has no gender indicator. Violence at water points is not measured in national surveys. National coverage measures overstate access compared with the JMP service ladder.

9.4 A governance gap

Women are present in water committees but rarely lead them, and they are almost absent from regulators, ministries and investment negotiations. Quotas, where they exist, are not met.

9.5 A financing gap

The WASH sector is underfunded overall, and the share of spending that targets women's specific needs is unknown because it is not tracked. Gender budget lines, where they exist, are seldom funded. Climate adaptation finance rarely reaches women-led organisations.

10. Recommendations

10.1 To States Parties to the Maputo Protocol

1. **Report on Article 15 in every periodic report** to the African Commission, using the checklist in the annex, with sex-disaggregated data on access, time spent collecting water and safety.
2. **Include a gender chapter in national water laws and codes**, starting with the revisions under way in Senegal and Cameroon, with a duty to reduce women's time burden and to guarantee safe access at any time of day, in line with Guidelines 22.1 and 22.2.
3. **Set binding quotas of at least 40% women** in water user associations, municipal water committees, basin authorities and national regulators, and publish membership by sex every year.
4. **Introduce a WASH gender budget marker** and report on it under Article 26(2) of the Protocol.
5. **Make every school and health facility a safe place for women and girls**, with water, separate and lockable toilets, menstrual facilities and lighting.
6. **Add a module on safety at water points** to Demographic and Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys.
7. **Ratify the Maputo Protocol** where this has not yet been done, in particular Niger and Chad in West and Central Africa.

10.2 To the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

1. Ensure that the Guidelines on the Right to Sanitation under Resolution 658 address menstrual health, safety, women's participation and financing, through open consultations with women's organisations in all regions.
2. Consider a General Comment on Article 15 of the Maputo Protocol that clarifies State obligations on water, energy and land for women.
3. Ask specific questions on Article 15 during the examination of State reports, and include water in concluding observations.
4. Encourage the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa to undertake a thematic study on women, water and climate change.

10.3 To the African Union and AMCOW

1. Add sex-disaggregated indicators to the monitoring framework of the Africa Water Vision 2063, including time spent collecting water and women's share of decision-making posts.
2. Bring forward the 2033 milestone on gender-balanced sanitation governance and extend it to water governance.
3. Use the closing of the 2026 theme of the year to adopt a continental commitment on women's rights to water and sanitation, building on Article 15.

10.4 To development partners and funders

1. Require sex-disaggregated data and women's participation targets in every WASH investment, and publish results.
2. Fund women-led organisations directly to monitor water services and to take part in governance, including through climate adaptation finance.
3. Support national statistical offices to measure water collection by individual and violence at water points.

10.5 To civil society and women's rights organisations

1. Prepare shadow reports on Article 15 for the African Commission, using RFLD's manual on shadow reporting.
2. Take part in the consultations on the Guidelines on the Right to Sanitation and in national processes linked to the 2026 UN Water Conference.
3. Document community evidence on time, safety and service quality, with the informed consent of the women concerned.
4. Build alliances with water engineers, local authorities and journalists to keep women's rights on the water agenda.

11. Advocacy calendar 2026 to 2028

Table 4. Key moments for advocacy on women and water

Date	Moment and opportunity
15 October 2026	International Day of Rural Women: national dialogues on this report
October 2026	89th Ordinary Session of the African Commission, Dakar: oral statements and side events on Article 15
19 November 2026	World Toilet Day: menstrual health and safe school sanitation
2 to 4 December 2026	UN Water Conference, United Arab Emirates, co-hosted by Senegal: commitments on gender and water
2026 to 2028	Drafting of the ACHPR Guidelines on the Right to Sanitation (Res. 658): written inputs and regional consultations
February 2027	AU summit: review of the 2026 theme and follow-up of the Africa Water Vision 2063

Date	Moment and opportunity
22 March 2027 and 2028	World Water Day: national accountability reports
Each ACHPR session	Examination of State reports: questions on Article 15 and shadow reports

Sources: ACHPR (2026a); UN-Water (2025); African Union (2026a).

Annex. Article 15 reporting checklist

This checklist can be used by States when preparing periodic reports under Article 26 of the Maputo Protocol, and by civil society when preparing shadow reports. Each question should be answered with data disaggregated by sex, age, location and, where possible, disability.

TEMPLATE Article 15 and water: questions for reporting

Legal framework	<i>Does national law recognise the right to water? Does the water law contain provisions on women and girls? </i>
Access	<i>What share of women live in households with safely managed water? What share rely on collected water? </i>
Time burden	<i>How much time do women and girls spend collecting water each day? What measures reduce it? </i>
Safety	<i>Have violence and harassment at water points and sanitation facilities been assessed? What measures exist? </i>
Schools	<i>What share of schools have water, separate toilets and menstrual facilities? </i>
Health facilities	<i>What share of maternity wards have water on site? </i>
Governance	<i>What share of seats and leadership posts in water bodies are held by women? Is there a quota? </i>
Budget	<i>What share of the WASH budget targets women's and girls' specific needs? Was it executed? </i>
Climate	<i>Do adaptation plans address women's access to water? Do women-led organisations receive climate finance? </i>
Participation	<i>How were women's organisations consulted in preparing this report? </i>

Abbreviations

ACERWC	African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
AIP	Continental Africa Water Investment Programme
AMCOW	African Ministers' Council on Water

AU	African Union
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
GLAAS	UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
JMP	WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SWA	Sanitation and Water for All
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WACDEP-G	Water, Climate, Development and Gender Investments Programme
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

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