



ACERWC
African Committee of Experts on
the Rights and Welfare of the Child

ACERWC Secretariat | E-mail: acerwc-secretariat@africanunion.org
Tel: +266 52 01 00 18 | P.O.Box: 13460,
Address: Nala House, Balfour Road Maseru
Kingdom of Lesotho

DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD 2026

**THEME: ENSURING UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO WATER, SANITATION AND
HYGIENE FOR EVERY CHILD IN AFRICA**

CONCEPT NOTE

I. Background

The Day of the African Child (DAC) was launched by the Assembly of Heads of State of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1991 to be commemorated on 16 June each year. The DAC pays tribute to the 1976 student uprising in Soweto, South Africa, which resulted in the killings of students who demonstrated against the poor quality of education they received and demanding to be taught in their own language by the apartheid regime. Over the years, the Day has been an opportunity for all stakeholders and actors involved in the protection and promotion of children's rights in Africa to come together, to consolidate common goals and to tackle the obstacles that stand in the way of achieving an Africa fit for its children.

As guardian of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (the African Children's Charter/ACRWC), the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC/Committee) has spearheaded the commemoration of the DAC since 2002. The ACERWC is an Organ of the African Union established in accordance with articles 32 and 33 of the ACRWC mandated to promote and protect the rights and welfare of the child in Africa and monitor its implementation. Each year, the Committee identifies a relevant theme for the Day, which is further adopted by the Executive Council of the AU, organizes and coordinates activities and events to commemorate the Day at continental level.

For 2026, the theme of the Day of the African Child is "*Ensuring universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene for every child in Africa.*" This theme aligns with the African Union Theme of the Year 2026: "*Assuring sustainable water availability and safe sanitation systems to achieve the goals of Agenda 2063,*" adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government at its 38th Ordinary Session held in February 2025 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia¹ and at its 39th Ordinary Session held on 14 February 2026, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The African Union's focus on water and sanitation for 2026 reflects growing continental recognition that sustainable water resource management is central to Africa's economic growth, industrialisation, employment creation and social transformation. Achieving the AU's broader vision of building robust, competitive and climate-resilient economies depends on the effective planning, development and management of Africa's water resources, as articulated in the Africa Water Vision 2025, the AU Agenda 2063, and related continental commitments, including the Sharm El-Sheikh Declaration on Water and Sanitation, the Malabo Declaration on agricultural transformation, and other AU and AMCOW policy frameworks aimed at strengthening water security, food production, climate resilience and sustainable livelihoods. In this context, African leaders dedicated 2026 to water and sanitation, recognising that improving sustainable water availability and sanitation systems is essential for advancing inclusive socio-economic development and safeguarding the well-being and future of Africa's children. This is evidenced in the crucial policy document, the Africa Water Vision 2063 & Policy

¹ *Decisions* of the 38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, 15–16 February 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Assembly/AU/Dec.912(XXXVIII), available at: [AU Assembly Decisions \(Assembly/AU/Dec.903-941\(XXXVIII\)\)](#)

(AWVP63), which will serve as the primary strategic framework to achieve water security on the continent.

Recognising the central importance of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) to children's survival, development and well-being, as well as the critical link between access to WASH services and the realisation of all child rights, the ACERWC, during its 46th Ordinary Session, adopted a child-centred theme for the Day of the African Child 2026. This theme aims to highlight the specific implications of water insecurity for children and to elevate children's rights to water, sanitation, and hygiene within continental policy discussions.. Through this theme, the Committee seeks to galvanise renewed commitments by Member States, development partners and stakeholders to accelerate progress toward universal, equitable, climate-resilient and child-responsive WASH systems, for children across Africa, with particular attention to children living in rural areas, informal settlements, humanitarian contexts and climate-vulnerable regions, enabling all children in Africa to survive, learn, grow and thrive.

The purpose of this concept note is to provide guidance to Member States on the main objectives of the theme, and the various measures that should be undertaken by States in the celebration of the theme. The Committee notes that the DAC provides an opportunity for children, Member States, policy makers, organisations and other stakeholders on the continent working on children's issues to review and evaluate efforts, policies and programmes aimed to protect and promote children's rights considering the theme. The DAC calls for serious introspection and a commitment to addressing the challenges facing African children.

II. Rationale for DAC 2026

Although Africa is endowed with significant water resources², the continent is facing increasing and interconnected water security challenges that threaten sustainable development, human well-being and the realization of children's rights. According to the African Union's water development priorities framework rapid population growth, urbanisation, industrialisation and expanding economic demands are placing unprecedented pressure on water resources. These trends, combined with insufficient expansion of sanitation infrastructure, are expected to intensify environmental degradation and pollution of water bodies, further constraining safe water availability.³ Africa's population, estimated at 1.5 billion in 2024, is projected to reach approximately 2.5 billion by 2050⁴, while the continent is expected to host nearly one billion children by 2055⁵, significantly increasing the demand for WASH services for both present and future generations.

² Africa Water Vision 2025, page 7.

³ AU Theme 2026 CN: para 22, available at:

https://archives.au.int/bitstream/handle/123456789/11188/EX%20CL%201623%20%28XLVII%29_E.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁴ As above.

⁵ UNICEF, Children in Africa: Key Statistics on Child Survival, Protection and Development, 2019, available at: <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Children-in-Africa.pdf>

Despite progress in expanding water services across Africa, significant inequalities persist, particularly in access to safely managed drinking water. Disaggregated data from the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme disparities highlight disparities that disproportionately affect rural populations, where gaps in access can reach as high as 35 percentage points compared to urban areas. In many communities, women and girls often spend considerable time collecting water, frequently exceeding 30 minutes daily, which affects their education and health outcomes.⁶ Furthermore, climate change is intensifying these challenges by altering rainfall patterns, increasing water scarcity, and raising the frequency and severity of droughts and floods. This worsening situation is evident in critical areas like Lake Chad, which has shrunk drastically since the 1960s, leaving millions dependent on it for fresh water, agriculture, fishing, and livestock vulnerable. Such pressures are particularly acute in fragile contexts affected by conflict and environmental degradation, where limited infrastructure reduces resilience and access to basic services, further exacerbating the difficulties faced by communities across the continent.

The consequences of inadequate WASH services are especially severe for children. According to UNICEF, over 190 million children across ten African countries are at high risk from water-related threats, including unsafe water, poor sanitation, climate-related hazards, and WASH-related diseases. Approximately two out of five deaths in these nations are attributable to unsafe WASH services.⁷ The lack of safe WASH contributes significantly to preventable child mortality, malnutrition, school absenteeism and reduced developmental outcomes, disproportionately affecting children in rural areas, informal settlements, humanitarian settings and children with disabilities.

These structural pressures have direct and disproportionate implications for children, affecting their health, nutrition, education, protection and overall development. Without strengthened investments in inclusive, climate-resilient and child-responsive WASH systems, Africa's development aspirations under Agenda 2063, the child rights Agenda 2040, and the Sustainable Development Goals risk being undermined. Addressing water security and ensuring universal, equitable and sustainable WASH access is therefore both a development priority and a human-rights obligation. In line with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and continental and international policy frameworks, strengthening child-responsive WASH systems is essential for safeguarding children's survival, dignity, resilience and long-term development, while contributing to a sustainable future for the continent.

⁶ UNICEF and WHO, *Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene 2000–2024: Special Focus on Inequalities*, WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP), 2025, available at: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/jmp-report-2025/>

⁷UNICEF, Triple Threat How disease, climate risks, and unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene create a deadly combination for children,2023: <https://www.unicef.org/media/137206/file/triple-threat-wash-EN.pdf>

III. Objectives

The overall objectives for the 2026 DAC on “Ensuring universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene for every child in Africa” is to mobilize political commitment, resources, and coordinated action across the continent. This initiative aims to ensure equitable, safe, and sustainable access to water, sanitation, and hygiene for every child, in line with States’ obligations under the African Children’s Charter and other relevant frameworks.

The DAC 2026 celebration aims specifically to achieve the following key objectives:

Integration: Strengthen the integration of WASH in child-centred policies and budgets, including health, education, nutrition, social protection, and climate adaptation strategies.

Evidence and Monitoring: Raise awareness of WASH as an essential rights issue for children; highlight its interdependence with health, education, nutrition and protection and spotlight existing gaps and good practices in WASH provision for children.

Inclusion and Participation: Promote child participation and ensure inclusion of vulnerable groups including girls, children with disabilities, rural and informal settlement communities, and displaced children in WASH strategies and interventions.

Accountability: Promote accountability and monitoring towards progressive realization of the rights to water, sanitation and hygiene in line with AU, national and international commitments. Secure renewed commitments from Member States with specific, measurable pledges on child-responsive WASH, including legislative, budgetary, and institutional reforms.

IV. The Elements and Concepts of the theme

4.1. Normative standards

Access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene is firmly grounded in international and regional human rights law. In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly formally recognised the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, a recognition subsequently reaffirmed by the Human Rights Council. The normative content of these rights is elaborated in General Comment No. 15 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which interprets Articles 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This General Comment clarifies that the right to water is an essential component of the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to health, introducing the concept of “adequate water” into the discussion.

The General Comment further defines the human right to water as “the entitlement of everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses”. It emphasizes that an adequate amount of safe water is necessary to prevent death from dehydration, reduce the risk of water-related diseases,

and satisfy consumption, cooking, and personal hygiene needs. This understanding strengthens the notion of "adequacy" within the broader framework of the right to an adequate standard of living.

Within the same normative framework, sanitation is defined as "a system for the collection, transport, treatment and disposal or reuse of human excreta, together with associated hygiene". The human right to sanitation entitles everyone to services that ensure privacy and dignity and that are physically accessible, affordable, safe, hygienic, secure, and socially and culturally acceptable.

While international human rights law does not recognize hygiene as a separate human right, it is firmly embedded within the normative content of several recognised rights, particularly the rights to water, sanitation, health, an adequate standard of living and human dignity. General Comment No. 15 of the CESCR clarifies that water must be sufficient not only for drinking but also for personal and household hygiene. The human right to sanitation encompasses associated hygiene practices necessary to ensure safe management of human excreta and prevent disease. Similarly, international and regional child-rights standards, including the CRC and ACRWC, require States to promote hygiene education, environmental sanitation as part of their obligations to protect children's health. Consequently, ensuring access to hygiene services and practices forms an integral element of States' duties to realise the human rights to water, sanitation and health, particularly for children and other vulnerable groups.

Even prior to the global recognition of the human rights to water and sanitation, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) requires States to combat disease and malnutrition through the provision of clean drinking water (Article 24) and to ensure every child's right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27). Similarly, while the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) explicitly guarantees women, particularly rural women, the right to adequate living conditions, including water supply and sanitation (Article 14). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) explicitly refers to access to clean water under Article 28 (Adequate standard of living and social protection), requiring States to ensure equal access by persons with disabilities to clean water services, as part of guaranteeing an adequate standard of living.

At the regional level, the African Children's Charter explicitly places the right to water, sanitation and hygiene squarely in the context of health. Article 14 of this Charter obliges States Parties to ensure the provision of adequate safe drinking water, hygiene and environmental sanitation. Others regional instruments further reinforce these obligations, including the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) recognises women's right to adequate living conditions, including water and sanitation (Article 14(2)(a)). The Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention) requires States to provide internally displaced persons with essential services including water and sanitation (Articles 9 and 11). Additionally, the Protocol on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in

Africa requires States to ensure accessible basic services, including water and sanitation, for persons with disabilities (Articles 23 and 24).

Moreover, other soft laws set normative standards on the right to WASH, including General Comment No. 15 on the right to water (arts. 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) and the Handbook of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation on realising the human rights to water and sanitation, which outlines strategies for realizing these rights. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights interpreted through the rights to health (Article 16) and a satisfactory environment (Article 24), provides an additional legal basis for the protection of the right to water in the Guidelines on the Right to Water in Africa.

These treaty obligations are complemented by policy frameworks and other norms and standards developed to enhance the implementation of the human rights to water and associated rights, and provide guidance on the measures that need to be undertaken to realize these rights. Key instruments include *Africa's Agenda for Children 2040: Fostering an Africa Fit for Children*, particularly Aspiration 5, which targets universal access to sources of clean and safe drinking water, hygienic sanitation and hygiene facilities, adequate nutrition, and shelter or basic housing by 2040. Additionally, the African Union Agenda 2063; the Africa Water Vision 2025; the Africa Sanitation Policy Guidelines; and the Sustainable Development Goals- notably SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and SDG 4 (Quality Education) play a pivotal role. Furthermore, the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy (AWVP63), and its Action Framework are crucial for ensuring a strategic framework towards inclusive and climate resilient water security on the continent beyond 2025. The AWVP63 is expected to serve as the primary continental policy framework guiding Member States to implement commitments on water and sanitation for current and future generations.⁸

Together, these international and regional legal frameworks establish the obligations of States to ensure access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and associated hygiene services. They require deliberate, sustained, and inclusive legislative, policy, budgetary, and institutional measures to achieve universal, equitable, and sustainable access, particularly for children and other groups in vulnerable situations.

4.2. States parties Obligations

In line with the above normative standards and commitments, States must undertake concrete steps to work towards achieving universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene, guided by human rights principles and their defined standards. Under Article 1 of the African Children's Charter, States Parties undertake to recognise the rights, freedoms and duties enshrined in the Charter and to adopt legislative, administrative and other measures necessary for their effective implementation. As clarified in the ACERWC's General Comment No. 5 on State obligations, this duty applies to all rights

⁸ African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW), *Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy*, available at: <https://amcow-online.org/africa-water-vision-2063-and-policy/>

contained in the Charter without distinction, reflecting their indivisible, interdependent and mutually reinforcing nature. Accordingly, the realisation of children's civil and political rights is inseparable from the fulfilment of economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to health and its underlying determinants such as access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.

General Comment No. 5 further emphasises that States Parties, regardless of their level of economic development, are required to take deliberate, concrete and targeted steps towards the full realisation of children's rights, with particular attention to the most disadvantaged and marginalised children. While the expansion of certain services may occur progressively, States are under a continuous obligation to demonstrate measurable progress in extending the reach, quality and sustainability of essential services and may not invoke resource constraints as a justification for inaction or regression in the enjoyment of children's rights.

In implementing children's rights under the African Charter, States Parties assume three core and universally accepted interrelated obligations: to respect, protect and promote and fulfil those rights which applies equally in respect of the implementation of the African Children's Charter as a whole.

- **The obligation to respect-** requires States to refrain from actions that directly or indirectly interfere with children's enjoyment of their rights to safe drinking water and sanitation. This includes avoiding measures that limit or disrupt existing access to water sources or sanitation services without providing adequate, accessible and safe alternatives.
- **The obligation to protect-** requires States to prevent third parties including private actors, service providers or corporations from interfering with children's access to water and sanitation. This entails the adoption and enforcement of regulatory frameworks, monitoring mechanisms and accountability measures.
- **The obligation to fulfil-** requires States to take positive measures to ensure that the necessary conditions, infrastructure, policies and services are in place so that all children can realise their rights to water and sanitation. While services may be delivered through various actors, the State retains the primary responsibility to ensure availability, accessibility, acceptability, quality and sustainability, especially for children in vulnerable or marginalised situations.

Across all these obligations, and in accordance with Article 1 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, as interpreted in General Comment No. 5, States Parties are required to undertake all appropriate and positive measures to ensure the effective implementation of children's rights, including access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene. This entails the adoption of comprehensive legislative, administrative, budgetary and judicial measures.

Legislative measures

States Parties should:

- Recognise the human rights to water, sanitation and hygiene in constitutions, framework laws, sectoral legislation, regulations and policies, ensuring consistency with the normative content of availability, accessibility, quality, affordability and acceptability.
- Harmonise national legislation with international and regional human rights standards relating to children's rights and WASH.
- Establish enforceable service standards for public and private providers, including water quality requirements, affordability and continuity of services by private providers, sanitation facility safety standards, and regulations ensuring the safe collection, transport, treatment, disposal or reuse of wastewater and human waste.
- Ensure legal provisions require universal service coverage, including for rural areas, informal settlements, institutions, and humanitarian contexts.
- Provide legal guarantees preventing retrogressive measures that reduce previously attained levels of access.

Institutional and administrative measures

States Parties should:

- Establish clearly defined institutional mandates for planning, regulation, service provision, monitoring and accountability in the WASH sector.
- Develop integrated national strategies linking water, health, education, social protection, environmental management and child-protection systems.
- Strengthen regulatory bodies responsible for tariff setting, quality monitoring, licensing and compliance oversight.
- Ensure decentralised authorities have the technical, financial and administrative capacity to deliver equitable services.
- Implement national monitoring systems collecting disaggregated data on children's access to WASH, especially for vulnerable groups.
- Promote child participation, transparency and access to information in WASH planning and service delivery.

Budgetary measures

States Parties should:

- Allocate adequate, predictable and child-sensitive budgetary resources to ensure progressive expansion of WASH services.
- Integrate WASH into national development, education, health and social protection budgets.

- Prioritise investments that expand access for marginalised children, including in rural, fragile, climate-affected and displacement settings.
- Ensure efficient, transparent and accountable expenditure, including measures to prevent corruption and resource diversion.
- Mobilise domestic and international financing mechanisms consistent with agreed social-sector investment commitments and reporting obligations.

Judiciary measures

States Parties should:

- Ensure that children’s rights to water and sanitation are justiciable at national level and enforceable through courts, quasi-judicial bodies and independent oversight institutions.
- Establish accessible complaint and remedy mechanisms, including administrative, judicial and regulatory grievance systems.
- Provide effective remedies for violations, including restitution, compensation, corrective measures and guarantees of non-repetition.
- Strengthen the role of national human rights institutions, child ombudspersons and regulatory authorities in monitoring compliance.
- Facilitate child-friendly access to justice, including legal assistance and procedural accommodations for children.

4.3 Components of the theme:

The theme of the Day of the African Child 2026 reflects the recognition that access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene services is fundamental to the realisation of all children’s rights, as enshrined in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. In particular, Article 14 of the Charter recognises every child’s right to adequate safe drinking water, hygiene and environmental sanitation. Interpreting what constitutes “adequate” WASH services for children requires reference to international human rights standards.

As mentioned above, guidance is provided under the UN CESCR’s General Comment No. 15 which clarifies that the adequacy of water and sanitation services is determined by core normative elements applicable in all circumstances⁹. These standards are further elaborated in the UN Handbook on Realising the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation, which identifies five interrelated dimensions that should guide policy development, planning, budgeting and service delivery: availability, accessibility, quality and safety, affordability, and acceptability.¹⁰ Achieving universal access therefore requires States to

⁹ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *General Comment No. 15 (2002): The Right to Water (Arts. 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)*, para. 10-12.

¹⁰Catarina de Albuquerque (UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation), *Handbook on Realizing the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation*, OHCHR, Geneva, 2014. Available at:

adopt rights-based, inclusive and sustainable measures that prioritise children in vulnerable situations, including those living in rural areas, informal settlements, humanitarian contexts and climate-affected regions.

1. Availability

Children must have a sufficient and continuous supply of safe water for drinking, hygiene, food preparation, menstrual hygiene management and the safe disposal of children's faeces. Adequate WASH facilities must be available not only in households but also in schools, health facilities, childcare institutions, public spaces and emergency settings. Service provision must also be sustainable, ensuring that water and sanitation systems remain functional for present and future generations.

2. Accessibility

Water and sanitation facilities must be physically accessible, safe and located within reasonable distance from homes, schools, health centres and communities. Services should be designed to be usable by all children, including girls, children with disabilities, children living with chronic illnesses, and those in rural or crisis-affected settings. Accessibility also includes access to information on water quality, safe use, hygiene practices and service availability.

3. Quality and Safety

Water must be safe for consumption and personal hygiene, free from harmful chemical, biological and radiological contaminants¹¹ and compliant with internationally recommended safety standards for human health¹². In addition to safety water should possess acceptable sensory qualities, including appropriate colour, taste and odour, so that it is suitable for all personal and household uses. Sanitation systems must ensure the safe collection, treatment and disposal of human waste to protect children's health and prevent disease transmission. Facilities should include hand-washing infrastructure, hygiene promotion and menstrual hygiene management services. Particular attention should be given to handwashing, given its significant and disproportional impact on child health linked with diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections. States should implement the WHO/ UNICEF Global Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Community Setting and and recognize hand hygiene and infrastructure as distinct policy and investment priorities.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-water-and-sanitation/handbook-realizing-human-rights-water-and-sanitation>

¹¹ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *General Comment No. 15 (2002): The Right to Water (Arts. 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)*, para. 12.

¹² WHO, *Guidelines for drinking-water quality* (2011).

4. Affordability

Water, sanitation and hygiene services must be affordable for all households so that the cost of accessing WASH does not compromise the ability to meet other essential needs such as food, education and healthcare. Where necessary, States should adopt subsidies, social protection measures or free minimum basic services to ensure equitable access for children living in poverty.

5. Acceptability, Dignity and Privacy

WASH facilities must be culturally acceptable and designed to ensure children's dignity, safety and privacy, including gender-sensitive sanitation facilities and appropriate menstrual hygiene management provisions. Facilities that do not ensure dignity and privacy are unlikely to be used and therefore undermine the effective enjoyment of children's rights.

4.4 Principles Underpinning Children's Right to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Non-discrimination:

The ACERWC recognises the principle of non-discrimination as both a general principle guiding the implementation of all children's rights and as a substantive right in itself, as enshrined in Article 3 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. In accordance with this provision, States Parties are required to ensure that every child enjoys the rights and freedoms recognised and guaranteed in the Charter without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parents' or legal guardians' race, ethnic group, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, fortune, birth or other status.

In the context of access to WASH, this obligation requires States to adopt deliberate and targeted measures to eliminate disparities in access that disproportionately affect children in situations of vulnerability and marginalisation, including children living in poverty, girls, children with disabilities, children in rural or underserved areas, displaced and migrant children, and children affected by conflict, emergencies or climate-related crises. Furthermore, children in Africa's Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and children living in coastal areas of the continent face a particular vulnerability due to sea-level rise and resulting contamination of limited fresh water sources, higher risk of environmental disasters and other factors. This requires targeted effort that takes in to account specific geographical vulnerabilities. The obligation of non-discrimination therefore extends beyond formal equality in law to include the duty to prohibit both direct and indirect discrimination and to address structural barriers and systemic inequalities that prevent certain groups of children from accessing safe, affordable and adequate WASH services on an equal basis with others.

Best interests of the child:

The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all decisions affecting children. Embedding WASH standards in schools, health facilities, care institutions, and communities ensures that policies, legislation, budgets, and emergency responses are aligned with what is best for children's health, safety, and well-being. Child-centred WASH planning reduces exposure to disease, enhances dignity and privacy especially for girls and creates safer learning and living environments. Applying this principle requires that WASH investments and service design be assessed through a child-rights lens, ensuring that children's specific needs are systematically prioritised in both development and humanitarian contexts.

Ensuring the best interests of the child also requires addressing the structural drivers that undermine sustainable access to WASH, including poverty, climate change (such as droughts and floods), conflict, rapid urbanisation, and displacement. These factors erode water security and damage WASH infrastructure, disproportionately affecting children and heightening protection risks.

In line with the principle of the best interests of the child, States should adopt a short, medium, and long-term approaches to WASH planning and budgeting. While immediate measures must ensure children's access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene services, long-term strategies should prioritize climate-resilient, conflict-sensitive, and child-safe WASH systems capable of sustaining access over time. Such measures protect children today while building resilience, ensuring that present interventions continue to serve and safeguard the rights of future generations.

Life, Survival and development:

Safe and reliable WASH services are fundamental to children's right to life, survival and development. Access to clean water, adequate sanitation, and hygiene prevents waterborne diseases, reduces malnutrition, and lowers infant and child mortality. Reliable WASH at the household and community levels also reduces time burdens often borne by girls and supports children's physical, cognitive and emotional development. By enabling children to grow, learn, and thrive in healthy environments, WASH services serve as a foundational condition for the realisation of multiple interconnected rights.

Child participation:

Children have the right to be informed, heard, and involved in decisions affecting them. Meaningful child participation in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of WASH services helps ensure that facilities are accessible, safe, culturally appropriate, and responsive to children's lived realities. Involving children especially girls and children from marginalised groups strengthens accountability and improves service use and sustainability. Their perspectives can inform national and local plans, school WASH standards, and community-level solutions, reinforcing children's agency and dignity.

Principles of indivisibility and interdependence of children rights :

All rights recognised in the African Children's Charter are indivisible, interdependent and mutually reinforcing, and their implementation must therefore be pursued in a comprehensive and integrated manner. As clarified in General Comment No. 5 of the ACERWC, the Charter establishes no hierarchy among civil, political, economic, social, cultural or protection rights, and States Parties are required to undertake all necessary legislative, administrative, budgetary and other measures to realise the rights of every child.

In line with the child-rights-based approach articulated in General Comment No. 5, State Parties must see their duty as fulfilling applicable legal obligations to each and every child, and the implementation of children's rights must not be regarded as a charitable process. States are required to undertake all possible positive measures towards the realisation of the rights of the child contained in the Charter, paying particular attention to the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups. While some aspects of rights implementation may require progressive realisation, this must be understood as requiring rapid forward progress and cannot be interpreted as permitting postponement of implementation or the adoption of retrogressive measures that reduce previously achieved levels of access.

In accordance with these principles, States Parties are expected to mobilise and allocate adequate financial, institutional and human resources to ensure the effective implementation of children's rights, including through compliance with agreed regional and international commitments relating to social sector investment, strengthened accountability mechanisms, and improved monitoring of service delivery outcomes. Claims of resource constraints do not absolve States of their obligation to demonstrate concrete efforts to expand access to essential services and to prioritise investments that directly advance children's rights.

Within this framework, access to WASH must be addressed through integrated national development, health, education, social protection and water-management strategies, recognising that the enjoyment of the right to water is inseparable from the enjoyment of all other child rights. The absence of adequate WASH services undermines multiple rights simultaneously and disproportionately affects children living in poverty, rural and informal settlements, humanitarian contexts, and other situations of vulnerability.

Access to WASH is therefore directly interdependent with the realisation of a broad range of substantive rights. In contrast, the lack of WASH facilities undermines these rights. Key associated rights include:

- **Right to health and health services:** Safely managed WASH underpins disease prevention (e.g., diarrhoeal diseases), infection control in health facilities, menstrual health and hygiene, and significantly reduces infant and child mortality.
- **Right to nutrition:** Water security is integral to food security, safe water is needed for breastfeeding, food preparation and hygiene, and helps prevent hunger and malnutrition.

- **Right to education:** Adequate WASH services in schools improves attendance retention and learning outcomes, particularly for girls, by reducing illness-related absenteeism and addressing menstrual needs.
- **Rights of children in conflict and humanitarian situation :** Child-sensitive, conflict-aware and climate-resilient WASH is essential where systems are disrupted.
- **Rights of children with disabilities:** Accessible, adapted designed facilities ensure dignity, autonomy and equal participation
- **Protection from violence, abuse and exploitation:** Safe, private sanitation and closer water access reduce exposure to gender-based violence and exploitation, including in emergencies and displacement.
- **Children in Conflict with the Law:** whether in police custody, remand homes, correctional centres, or in transit to and from court, the conditions of detention are shaped by WASH. Reliable access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene is a primary determinant of health, dignity and safety, and of compliance with child-friendly justice standards.

V. Activities to be undertaken by the ACERWC to commemorate DAC 2026

During the commemoration of the Day of the African Child 2026, the ACERWC will organise a series of activities aimed at promoting meaningful child participation and advancing dialogue on children’s rights to water, sanitation and hygiene.

Training sessions for participating children will be held on 14–15 June 2026 to strengthen their understanding of the African Children’s Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, as well as the role of the Committee. These sessions will equip children to engage effectively in discussions on the DAC 2026 theme. Following these sessions, children will prepare an Outcome Statement outlining their perspectives, priorities and recommendations addressed to Member States and relevant stakeholders.

The continental commemoration, to be held on 16 June 2026, will bring together children, Member States, AU organs, development partners, civil society organisations and other stakeholders, during which children will present the key findings from their deliberations and engage in an intergenerational dialogue with policy makers and child rights actors. An official Outcome Statement summarising children’s perspectives and calling for concrete actions to ensure universal access to WASH services for every child in Africa will be released following the celebration.

The ACERWC is developing a General Comment on Article 14(2)(c) of the Charter to clarify the content of the right and further elaborate on the obligations of State Parties to ensure the provision of adequate nutrition and safe drinking water to every child. In this context, the ACERWC will undertake a series of deliberations that engage various stakeholders, including governments, civil society, and child rights advocates, to gather insights and recommendations on enhancing the understanding and implementation of these rights.

These deliberations will align closely with the theme of the 2026 Day of the African Child, "Ensuring Universal Access to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene for Every Child in Africa." The emphasis on adequate nutrition and safe drinking water is integral to this theme, as it underscores the interdependence of water, sanitation, hygiene, and children's overall health and development. By consulting children and ensuring their perspectives are included, the ACERWC aims to promote meaningful engagement that highlights the real-life implications of insufficient access to these essentials.

In line with the DAC theme, the ACERWC will also collaborate with relevant partners to raise awareness of how adequate nutrition and safe drinking water are fundamental components of children's health and well-being. Through this initiative, the Committee aspires to strengthen accountability among State Parties, urging them to adopt robust policies and allocate the necessary resources to fulfill every child's right to water, sanitation, hygiene, and nutrition.

The outcomes of these initiatives will be compiled and reported to the Executive Council of the African Union, where decisions will be made regarding the actions required by States Parties.

VI. Recommendations to Member States:

As part of the celebration of the DAC 2026, Member States are encouraged to undertake measures to ensure the realization of equitable and universal access to WASH beyond the celebration on 16th June. The ACERWC recommends that Member States should consider undertaking the below measures and activities:

Areas	Recommendation
Legislative and Policy Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognise children's rights related to access to water, sanitation and hygiene in constitutions, national legislation, regulations and sectoral policies, consistent with international and regional human rights standards. - Define the normative content of these rights in law and policy, including availability, accessibility, quality and safety, affordability and acceptability, and ensure that national standards are regularly reviewed and progressively strengthened. - Integrate children's rights considerations into all national WASH strategies, policies and development plans. - Establish national standards ensuring that WASH facilities in schools, health facilities, childcare institutions and detention facilities

	<p>for children meet child-appropriate safety, accessibility and dignity requirements, in accordance with the UNICEF/WHO JMP service ladders, aiming for "safely managed" services as the standard, with "basic" as a minimum benchmark, particularly in schools and healthcare facilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that AWVP63 incorporates child-responsive WASH targets and indicators.
<p>Safety, Quality and Environmental Protection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish and enforce national water-quality and wastewater-treatment standards applicable to both public and private service providers. - Adopt regulatory measures to protect water resources from pollution, including the control of industrial discharge, agricultural runoff and improper waste disposal. - Ensure that sanitation systems safely manage human waste and protect communities, particularly children, from health risks.
<p>Child-Sensitive Planning, Budgeting and Financing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that national planning and budgeting processes incorporate child-sensitive WASH allocations. - Allocate adequate and dedicated budget lines for child-focused WASH interventions, including school WASH, early childhood centres, and community child services. - Prioritise investments in underserved regions and communities where children face the highest deprivation. - Establish targeted subsidy schemes to ensure affordability of WASH services for households with children living in poverty.
<p>Non-Discrimination and Inclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prohibit direct and indirect discrimination in access to WASH services and prioritise children in vulnerable situations. - Address disparities affecting girls, children with disabilities, rural children, displaced

	<p>children, children in humanitarian settings and children in informal settlements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure the application of the recognized minimum standards for WASH in humanitarian response, the Sphere standards, to ensure dignity and lifesaving quality in context of crisis. - Ensure equitable service provision regardless of tenure status, migration status or socio-economic background. - Ensure inclusive design standards, in accordance with the 2024 UNOPS/UNICEF/WaterAid <i>Guidelines for Developing Inclusive WASH Infrastructure</i>, so that facilities are accessible to children of different ages and abilities. - Adopt decentralised service strategies that reduce geographic inequalities in children’s access to services.
<p>Child Participation and Access to Information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guarantee meaningful participation of children in the design, monitoring and evaluation of WASH laws, policies and programmes affecting them. - Ensure access to child-friendly information on water quality, hygiene practices, available services and environmental protection.
<p>Child-Friendly Service Delivery and Safety</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that WASH facilities used by children are safe, gender-responsive, accessible and protective of privacy and dignity, including menstrual hygiene management. - Guarantee continuous availability of safe water in schools, health facilities and childcare institutions. - Integrate hygiene promotion programmes targeting children and caregivers.
<p>Sustainability and Climate Resilience for Children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incorporate climate-resilient WASH infrastructure in communities vulnerable to droughts, floods and environmental degradation.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote sustainable operation and maintenance systems to ensure uninterrupted services for children.
<p>Monitoring, Data and Child-Focused Indicators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish clear institutional responsibilities for the sustainable operation, maintenance and regulation of water and sanitation services. - Strengthen national monitoring systems using child-disaggregated data (age, gender, disability, location). - Track progress on school WASH, child health WASH indicators and inequalities affecting children. - Integrate child disaggregated WASH data the African Water and Sanitation Sector Monitoring and Reporting (WASSMO) System.
<p>Accountability and Access to Justice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that children’s rights to water and sanitation are legally enforceable and justiciable at national level and supported by accessible complaint and grievance mechanisms accessible to children and caregivers regarding WASH service failures. - Establish complaint and grievance mechanisms accessible to children and caregivers regarding WASH service failures. - Ensure independent oversight of service providers to guarantee compliance with child-sensitive standards. - Provide effective remedies where children’s WASH-related rights are violated.
<p>Integrity and Good Governance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote transparent use of public resources allocated to child-focused WASH services. - Strengthen community and school-level oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability in service delivery.

ANNEX

Monitoring framework for reporting on the commemoration of the Day of the African Child 2026

Theme: Ensuring Universal Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Every Child in Africa

This template provides a reporting framework that AU Member States and stakeholders can use to report to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) regarding national, regional activities undertaken to commemorate the Day of the African Child 2026.

Country:.....

Partners:

Measures and activities undertaken :

Provide a brief summary of the national WASH situation for children, including key challenges, disparities (urban/rural, gender, disability, humanitarian settings), and priorities identified during the commemoration.

.....
.....

Indicate existing or newly adopted laws, policies, strategies or institutional frameworks aimed at ensuring children's access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services.

.....
.....

Indicate measures taken to integrate children's WASH needs into national development plans, sector plans and budgeting processes, including dedicated WASH allocations targeting children.

.....
.....

Provide information on programmes, projects or interventions implemented to expand access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene services for children (schools, health facilities, communities, emergency settings).

.....
.....

Describe actions taken to ensure equitable access to WASH services for children in vulnerable situations, including children with disabilities, children in rural areas, displaced children, children in informal settlements, and girls.

.....
.....

Indicate measures in place to monitor access to WASH services for children, including data collection systems, indicators, reporting mechanisms and accountability processes.

.....

.....

Provide information on initiatives undertaken to involve children in awareness, advocacy, monitoring or decision-making processes related to water, sanitation and hygiene.

.....

.....

Highlight key results, successful initiatives, partnerships or innovations that contributed to improving children’s access to WASH.

.....

.....

Identify major challenges encountered and propose recommendations for strengthening child-responsive WASH systems.

.....

.....

Report on Events Organised on or leading up to 16 June 2026

EVENT	DETAILS OF EVENT	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS/THOSE REACHED (CHILDREN)*	DETAILS OF IMPLEMENTING AGENCY	NATIONAL, REGIONAL OR DISTRICT LEVEL IMPACT*

Provide disaggregated data on age, sex, place of origin, etc.