



1st

AFRICAN WOMEN IN WASH AWARDS

WINNERS BOOKLET

Elevating Women's Leadership,
Shaping Africa's WASH Future

Convened by:

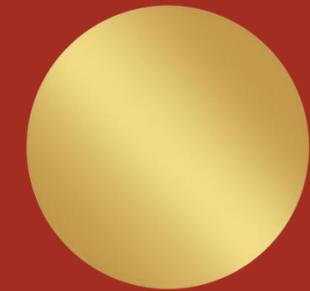
Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN)

African Water and Sanitation Association (AfWASA)

11 February 2026, Yaoundé, Cameroon



Voahary Rakotovelomanantsoa, Madagascar
Winner, Top Woman In WASH Category
1st African Women In WASH Awards.



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OUR COMMITMENT
MOVING FORWARD

CELEBRATING
OUR
CONVENERS
&
CHAMPIONS



Strong institutions create space for women to lead, and the African Women in WASH Awards show how collaboration turns recognition into lasting impact.

The African Women in WASH Awards shine because of the vision, leadership, and commitment of their conveners: the African Water and Sanitation Association (AfWASA) and the Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN). These institutions form the backbone of this inaugural continental celebration, demonstrating how strong allies can intentionally create space for women to lead, excel, and shape the future of Africa's water sector. AfWASA anchors the Awards as Africa's leading water sector institution, providing legitimacy, authority, and continuity. By embedding the Awards within its governance structure and Congress platform, AfWASA ensures this initiative is not a one-time recognition, but a sustained continental mechanism. This institutionalisation aligns the Awards with Africa's foremost water body, strengthens their continental policy and regulatory interface, guarantees continuity beyond leadership cycles, reinforces structured oversight, and integrates the initiative into AfWASA's strategic priorities. Through AfWASA's stewardship, the Awards gain continental convening authority, structured annual positioning within the AfWASA Congress, visibility across member utilities and institutions, and access to a multi-country professional network. In doing so, recognition becomes a permanent and respected feature of Africa's water governance landscape.

RWSN co-convenes the Awards with a strong commitment to equity, inclusion, and technical excellence. Drawing on global expertise in rural water supply, groundwater management, last-mile service delivery, and knowledge management, RWSN ensures that the Awards meaningfully recognise women working in underserved, rural, climate-vulnerable, Indigenous, and informal contexts. RWSN embeds rights-based and inclusion standards across nomination, judging, and storytelling processes, mobilises grassroots stakeholders while maintaining technical rigour, documents and shares innovations through knowledge platforms, co-leads the Top 30 African Women in Water Leaders list, and co-designs mentorship and legacy programmes linking established leaders with Rising Stars. Through this work, RWSN strengthens sectoral inclusion, technical integrity, and lasting impact, ensuring the Awards remain socially transformative, locally grounded, and globally informed. Together, AfWASA and RWSN turn recognition into opportunity, leadership into influence, and celebration into a lasting continental legacy. Their convening role demonstrates how institutions can champion women not only through words, but through structure, systems, and sustained commitment. The Inaugural African Women in WASH Awards are made possible through the institutional stewardship of Dr. Blaise Moussa, President, AfWASA; Olivier Gosso, Executive Director, AfWASA; and Sean Furey, Director, RWSN.



**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
AFWASA**

Ing. Olivier Gosso



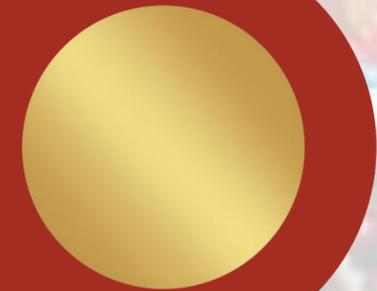
**DIRECTOR,
RWSN**

Sean Furey

We also appreciate the invaluable contributions of Dr. Rose Christine Kagwa, 2nd President of the AfWASA Strategic and Technical Council (STC), and Géraldine Mpouma Loigmo, General Coordinator of the Local Organising Committee (LOC), as well as the jury, partners, and all contributors who supported the delivery of the Awards. Their guidance, expertise, and dedication have ensured that this inaugural edition is credible, inclusive, and impactful across Africa.



Ambassador Amaka Judith Nweke, Nigeria
1st Runner Up, Policy and Advocacy Trail Blazer Category
1st African Women In WASH Awards.



FOUNDERS



CO-THEMATIC LEAD, RWSN
Euphresia Luseka



GENDER SPECIALIST, AFWASA
Dr.Leticia Ackun

FOREWORD

A Historic Continental Milestone

Elevating Women's Leadership. Shaping Africa's Water Future.

Africa's water transformation has always carried the imprint of women's leadership. Across utilities, ministries, research institutions, enterprises, and community systems, women have strengthened governance, engineered resilience, expanded access, and safeguarded public health— often without continental visibility, but never without impact. On 11 February 2026 in Yaoundé, Cameroon, during the Congress of the African Water and Sanitation Association (AfWASA), that leadership was formally and collectively recognised at scale. The Women in Water in Africa Awards mark the first Africa-led continental platform dedicated to elevating the women who are shaping WASH systems across our continent.

This booklet formally documents the governance, recognition, and long-term vision of the Women in Water in Africa Awards, serving as the institutional record of its inaugural edition. This initiative is not symbolic recognition. It is a structural contribution to Africa's long-term development architecture. It directly advances the aspirations of Agenda 2063— particularly Aspiration 6, which calls for a people-driven Africa that unleashes the full potential of its women and youth. It reinforces the mandate of the Africa Union's Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2018–2028, which prioritises leadership, voice, and visibility in economic and technical sectors. It aligns with the continental ambition of the Africa Water Vision and its 2026 focus on assuring sustainable water availability and safe sanitation systems as foundational to achieving Agenda 2063.

Water security, institutional performance, climate resilience, and gender equity are not parallel agendas; they are interdependent systems. Where utilities are inclusive, performance improves. Where governance reflects communities, accountability strengthens. Where women influence infrastructure planning and service delivery, solutions are more responsive, sustainable, and equitable. The evidence is clear: inclusive leadership is not an accessory to reform— it is a driver of it.

The Awards were therefore established to address a specific institutional deficit: the absence of a structured, Africa-led mechanism to systematically identify, document, and amplify women's leadership across the WASH value chain. Recognition at continental level matters because visibility shapes influence, influence shapes policy, and policy shapes systems. The response from across the sector confirmed both readiness and momentum. Within three weeks, more than 250 nominations were mobilised. From these submissions, an independent global jury identified a distinguished winners and Top 100 Women in Water in Africa, alongside category honourees in leadership, innovation, grassroots impact, policy advocacy, youth excellence, and lifetime achievement. This is evidence of a robust and diverse leadership pipeline.

These Awards resonate with the global themes of International Women's Day 2026 and World Water Day 2026, reinforcing a fundamental principle: securing clean water and safe sanitation expands economic opportunity, protects dignity, strengthens public health systems, and accelerates gender justice. *Where water flows, equality grows*— not as a slogan, but as a measurable development outcome. Yet this platform goes beyond celebration. It is designed as institutional infrastructure: a continental database of excellence, a structured Mentorship and Legacy Programme, and an evidence-based mechanism to track and strengthen women's leadership across Africa's water systems. Recognition must translate into representation. Visibility must translate into influence. Excellence must translate into succession pipelines.

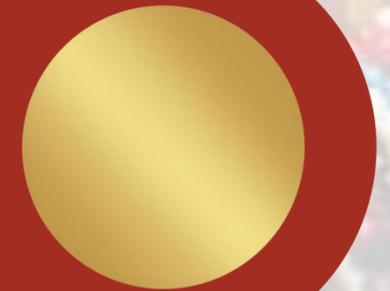
To the women honoured in Yaoundé: your leadership is not emerging, it is established. You are modernising utilities, shaping regulatory reform, engineering climate adaptation, mobilising finance, advancing research, and strengthening community systems. You are proving that equity and performance are mutually reinforcing forces within Africa's development trajectory. This inaugural edition signals a shift from episodic acknowledgment to systemic elevation. We are not merely hosting an awards ceremony. We are contributing to the governance architecture required to achieve Africa's water vision and the broader transformation envisaged in Agenda 2063.

The leadership has always existed. This platform ensures it is visible, institutionalised, and sustained.

Euphresia Luseka and Leticia Ackun Founders, African Women In WASH Awards



Gloria Musopole, Malawi
Winner, Rising Star Category
1st African Women In WASH Awards.



AWARDS GOVERNANCE CRITERIA AND SELECTION PROCESS



GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

The Awards were designed to meet high standards of transparency, independence, and credibility.

Oversight safeguards included:

- Independent, global jury
- Geographic and sectoral diversity
- Gender-balanced evaluation panel
- Conflict-of-interest declarations
- Standardised weighted scoring matrix

The integrity of the process underpins the legitimacy of recognition.

SELECTION PROCESS

Stage 1: Eligibility Review

Verification of: African nationality, Professional engagement in WASH, Age (Youth category) and Completeness of documentation

Stage 2: Expert Evaluation

Eligible submissions were assessed against weighted criteria: Measurable impact, Leadership influence, Innovation and scalability, Sustainability, Contribution to gender equity and Commitment to mentorship.

Assessment prioritised evidence over title and Outcomes over rhetoric.

AWARD CATEGORIES

The 2026 Awards recognised excellence across six categories:

1. Top Woman in WASH Leadership
2. Inclusive Innovation & Entrepreneurship
3. Indigenous Impact & Grassroots Champion
4. Policy & Advocacy Trailblazer
5. Youth Rising Star (Under 35)
6. Lifetime Achievement Award

Each category reflects a distinct dimension of sector contribution.

KEY
FIGURES



157+

**NOMINATIONS
SUBMITTED IN 3 WEEKS**

6

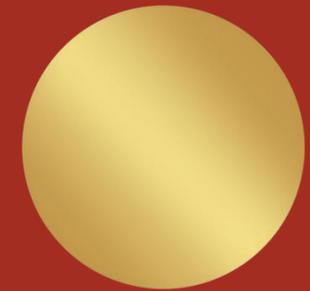
AWARD CATEGORIES

48+

**48 COUNTRIES IN AFRICA
PARTICIPATED AND SEVERAL
OTHERS GLOBALLY**



Vivian Kamagenge, Tanzania
Winner, Rising Star Category
1st African Women In WASH Awards.



JURY

About the Jury

The Africa Women In WASH Awards were guided by an independent, African and Global jury composed of high-level, influential, and highly respected senior experts from across the Water and Sanitation ecosystem. The jury brought together leaders from diverse sub-sectors: including utilities, policy and governance, research and academia, philanthropy, entrepreneurship, civil society, media, and multilateral institutions; ensuring that evaluation reflected both technical rigor and sector-wide credibility. Notably, jurors confirmed their participation on very short notice, demonstrating strong confidence in the integrity and relevance of the initiative and a shared commitment to elevating excellence in Africa's WASH sector. Careful attention was given to achieving regional balance across the continent, gender balance, youth representation, and broad sectoral diversity. This deliberate composition strengthened the legitimacy of the selection process and ensured that different contextual realities and professional lenses informed deliberations. To safeguard fairness and consistency, each award category was assessed by three or more jury members using defined evaluation criteria. Conflict-of-interest protocols were formally applied, and the review process was conducted independently of sponsorship considerations or institutional influence. The result was a rigorous, transparent, and merit-based selection process befitting a continental platform dedicated to recognising leadership and excellence in Africa's water sector.

We are deeply grateful to:



**CEO,
HUMAN RIGHT 2 WATER**

Amanda Loeffen



**HEAD OF POLICY,
SANITATION AND WATER FOR ALL**

Ajnani Kapoor



**SENIOR PROGRAM MANAGER,
CEWAS**

Antonella Vagliente



**YOUTH FOCAL POINT,
UN HABITAT, GWOPA**

Ashmeet Kharbanda



**HEALTH & GENDER EDITOR,
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Dorcas Muga

JURY



**ASST. PROF.,
IWRA**

Dr.-Ing. Dahlia Sabri



**SR. ADVISOR AND LECTURER,
UNIVERSITY OF ABOMEY**

Dr. Francine Abiola



**SR. DIRECTOR, OPERATIONS
WORLD VISION INTL.**

Dr. Fungai Makoni



LECTURER, IHE DELFT

Dr. Hadeeel Hosney



**CEO,
WATER RESEARCH COMMISSION**

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FOUNDATION**

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WATER.ORG**

Eng. Francis Musinguzi



**LEAD POLICY ANALYST- WASH
GOVERNANCE,
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Eng. Kariuki Mugo



**SR. OFFICER SANITATION,
INTERNATIONAL WATER AND
SANITATION**

Florence Laker

JURY



PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT OFFICER, UN-HABITAT GWOPA

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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY PAN-AFRICAN ASSOCIATION OF SANITATION ACTORS

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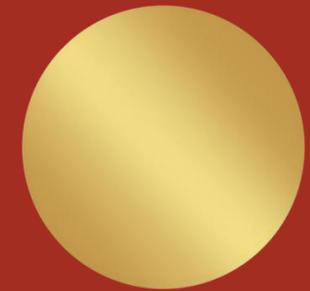


COUNTRY DIRECTOR, IRC WASH

Vida Duti



Sakwe Itoe Mbone, Cameroon
Winner, IndigenousImpact and Grass roots Category
1st African Women In WASH Awards.





WINNERS

On 11 February 2026, in Yaoundé, Cameroon, the Women in Water in Africa Awards were officially inaugurated during the AfWASA Congress 2026, gathering leaders from across the continent: policymakers, regulators, development partners, utility executives, entrepreneurs, and sector professionals united by a shared commitment to strengthening Africa's WASH systems.

The evening marked the first formal celebration of women whose leadership is shaping the future of WASH in Africa. Within one of the sector's most respected convenings, their work was recognized not as an exception, but as an essential force behind institutional progress, improved services, and sustainable reform. Held in alignment with the global observances of International Women's Day 2026 and World Water Day 2026, the Gala underscored a powerful message: advancing water security and advancing women's leadership go hand in hand.

The Awards honor leaders whose contributions are measurable, sustained, and transformative across the WASH value chain. From policy reform and regulatory excellence to operational management, innovation, financing, and community impact, each Category Winner represents a distinct yet interconnected dimension of sector advancement.

The 2026 winners exemplify:

- Vision that strengthens institutions and guides reform
- Innovation that improves access, efficiency, and resilience
- Governance that enhances accountability and performance
- Impact that reaches communities and improves lives
- Commitment that extends beyond projects to long-term sector growth

Together, they reflect the strength, expertise, and influence of women across Africa's WASH landscape. Their leadership is practical, achievements are substantive, impact is enduring. It is worth noting that we had a tie on Policy and Advocacy Trail Blazer Category and Rising Star Category.

The profiles that follow present the winning women shaping the present and defining the future of WASH in Africa.

1. Voahary Rakotovelomanantsoa from Madagascar.

Winner, Top Woman In WASH

In Madagascar, where water scarcity and climate shocks shape daily life, Voahary Rakotovelomanantsoa has built a career defined by resolve, reform, and results. Over more than 20 years, she has moved steadily through the ranks of the WASH sector; from rural water technician to program manager, to General Director of the National Authority of Water and Sanitation, to Minister of WASH, and later Governor of the climate-vulnerable Anosy Region. At every level, she has combined technical expertise with institutional vision, transforming fragmented systems into coordinated, accountable, and investment-ready platforms.

“Water is not only infrastructure. It is dignity, stability, and opportunity. When we strengthen water systems, we strengthen the nation.”

As Minister of WASH, Voahary led one of Madagascar’s most consequential reform periods. She consolidated national WASH coordination platforms, validated the National WASH Policy, and restored donor and investor confidence in the sector. Under her leadership, several hundred million US dollars were mobilized through public financing, development partners, and innovative Public-Private Partnerships. Among them was the pioneering “Co-invest – Build – Operate” model, designed to share risk, strengthen sustainability, and expand service coverage. The results were measurably, nationally significant reflecting not isolated projects, but systemic reform.:

- National drinking water access increased from 43% to 47%
- Urban water supply improved to up to 18 hours per day
- More than 200,000 people in southern Madagascar gained access to rehabilitated pipelines, solar-powered desalination systems, and emergency water networks

As Governor of the drought-affected Anosy Region, Voahary brought together emergency response and long-term resilience planning. Her approach integrated solar-powered systems, multi-purpose water infrastructure, and community-based management structures to protect vulnerable populations from recurring climate shocks. Sanitation initiatives expanded facilities in schools and health centers, reduced open defecation in targeted areas, and strengthened public health outcomes, particularly for women and children.

She notes, “Climate resilience begins with water security. If governments cannot rely on water, they cannot rely on their future.”

Beyond public service, Voahary founded Cabinet MANO and LOVA VELU SARL, platforms that scale innovative service delivery models, advise national and regional WASH initiatives, and mentor future women leaders. Her leadership embodies strategic governance reform, innovative financing, institutional strengthening, measurable community impact, and long-term sector contribution. In Madagascar and beyond, Voahary Rakotovelomanantsoa has demonstrated that when technical rigor meets inclusive leadership, water becomes more than a service; it becomes a foundation for equity, resilience, and national cohesion.



1. Faustina Boachie, Ghana. Chief Manager, Low-Income Dept. at Ghana Water Company Ltd.

1st Runner-Up, Top Woman In WASH

Ms. Faustina Boachie's journey from a young utility staff member in Ghana's Ashanti Region to a leading champion of inclusive urban water access is both inspiring and transformative. She currently serves as Chief Manager of the Low-Income Customer Support Department at Ghana Water Company Limited, where she has reshaped how urban utilities approach equity, affordability, and pro-poor service delivery. Beginning her career in 1999 as a Commercial Officer, Faustina quickly distinguished herself through commitment and integrity. She became Obuasi's first female District Manager, breaking barriers in a male-dominated sector, and laying the groundwork for innovations now influencing national water policy.

Her leadership blends empathy with strategy, guided by the belief, "The rise of women is not the fall of men."

At Ghana Water Limited, she transformed the Low-Income Customer Support Department from a single-person desk into a 27-member, multi-regional team reporting directly to the Managing Director. Her department has implemented subsidized household connections, supported Water User Associations, and introduced innovative financing mechanisms, ensuring that pro-poor strategy is central to utility planning. One flagship initiative, the Social Connection Fund, reduces water connection fees by up to 75%, and has now been incorporated into Ghana's 2024 National Water Policy. More than 37,000 households have benefited, bringing safe water to over 1 million residents, schools, and health facilities.

Under her stewardship, World Bank-supported projects exceeded connection targets by 250%, reaching an additional 368,000 people, while over 80 Water User Associations were established. Innovations such as drone mapping and smart standpipes have improved service delivery in informal settlements, and her inclusion-focused model has attracted multi-million-dollar investments from partners including the Danish government and the African Development Bank.

Faustina's leadership also prioritizes gender-sensitive programming and women's empowerment. Water scarcity in her childhood fuels her empathy and commitment to ensuring that women and girls gain time for education and economic participation. She has extended menstrual hygiene education in schools, linking WASH access with girls' educational continuity. Beyond utility leadership, she champions women's leadership continentally as President of WiWASH (Ghana) and Co-Chair of the African Water and Sanitation Association Professional Network of Women, creating 16 women's networks and delivering leadership training to 52 professionals from 13 countries.

"Equitable water services are not just about infrastructure; they are about opportunity, inclusion, and dignity for every community member."

Her results have been impactful:

- 37,000+ households gained safe water through subsidized connections
- Exceeded World Bank project targets by 250%, reaching 368,000+ additional people
- Established 80+ Water User Associations to strengthen community management
- Secured multi-million-dollar investments for inclusion-focused urban water programs
- Led 16 women's networks across Africa and trained 52 women leaders in WASH



1. Bethlehem Mengistu from Ethiopia. Executive Director at Agenda for Change

Winner, Policy and Advocacy Trail Blazer Category

Bethlehem Mengistu stands at the forefront of policy-driven transformation in Africa's water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector. With over 15 years of leadership across national, continental, and global platforms, she has demonstrated that sustained impact comes not from isolated projects, but from strong institutions, inclusive governance, and systems-level reform. Her career seamlessly blends strategic policy, technical understanding, and equity-driven advocacy. As Executive Director of Agenda for Change, a coalition of 22+ organisations across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, Bethlehem has led efforts to accelerate SDG 6 through nationally led reforms. She has aligned partners behind government-led systems-strengthening agendas, reduced fragmentation among development actors, and positioned the coalition as a credible platform for policy harmonisation, advocacy, and institutional learning.

“Sustainable WASH services are delivered by strong institutions and inclusive governance, not parallel projects.”

Previously, as Country Director of WaterAid Ethiopia, Bethlehem spearheaded a shift from project-based interventions to district-wide, government-led WASH reform under the One WASH National Programme. During her tenure, over 1.5 million people gained access to improved water and sanitation services. She developed and documented the Rural Water Board model, strengthening multi-village governance, cost recovery, and long-term service functionality. In urban settings, she advanced utility strengthening approaches, improving management, accountability, and service standards. Bethlehem played a catalytic role in Ethiopia's TSEDU campaign to end open defecation, mobilising high-level political commitment, including engagement with the Prime Minister and President to integrate sanitation into national development corridors. The campaign introduced ambitious urban sanitation targets, expanded access to public toilets, piloted inclusive disability-friendly facilities, and strengthened revenue and operational models, achieving measurable reductions in open defecation.

Equity and inclusion are central to her work. She launched the “Count Me In” initiative, embedding disability inclusion and gender-responsive planning within national WASH guidelines. She advocated for menstrual hygiene tax reform, addressing structural affordability barriers and reinforcing the link between WASH, dignity, education, and public health. Across programmes, she has consistently advanced the “Leave No One Behind” agenda, ensuring informal settlements, rural communities, women, girls, and persons with disabilities are recognised as rights-holders. At the continental level, Bethlehem contributed to AfricaSan Ngor Declaration, shaping accountability standards and equity commitments across African governments. She has strengthened collaboration with Sanitation and Water for All and the Rural Water Supply Network, promoting donor alignment and reinforcing government leadership as the cornerstone of sustainable reform. Her advisory work on large-scale programmes, including the USD 45 million USAID Urban WASH initiative and Ethiopia's 20 Towns Programme, which reached over 4 million people, demonstrates her ability to translate African service realities into scalable, donor-aligned programme architectures. Beyond institutional reform, Bethlehem is a champion for women's leadership in WASH. She has initiated national women's apprenticeship programmes and launched Agenda for Change's first global Women in WASH mentorship programme, nurturing emerging African professionals and amplifying African leadership within global water governance.

“Enduring progress depends on governance, accountability, and inclusive systems, anchored in national ownership and principled leadership.”

- Her other achievements include:
- 1.5M+ people gained access to improved water and sanitation in Ethiopia
- Reached 4M+ people through large-scale advisory and programme support
- Strengthened equity and accountability in AfricaSan Ngor Declaration
- Launched continental mentorship and apprenticeship programmes for women in WASH



1. Ambassador Amaka Judith Nweke from Nigeria. Commissioner IV, Enugu State Local Government Service Commission

1st Runner-Up, Policy and Advocacy Trail Blazer Category

Water governance in Enugu State, Nigeria, once fragmented, underfunded, and inequitable, has been completely reimagined under Ambassador Amaka Judith Nweke's leadership. Combining scientific expertise, rigorous policy frameworks, and strategic governance, she has elevated access to water from a service challenge to a legally recognized human right, setting a precedent for Nigeria and the African continent. Trained in Pure and Industrial Chemistry, with specialized WASH training and quality control expertise, Amaka translates technical assessments into legislative and operational solutions. Her early career in regulatory compliance, facility inspections, and chemical treatment protocols laid the foundation for a leadership style that merges evidence with advocacy, ensuring technical precision drives policy decisions.

As the visionary architect of the #ClaimYourWaterRights campaign and Pioneer Coordinator of the Network of Water Rights Initiative, Amaka operationalized a multi-layered strategy combining stakeholder mobilization, independent infrastructure assessments, legal advocacy, and community empowerment. This evidence-driven approach led to the historic Enugu State Water Law, Nigeria's first legislation explicitly recognizing access to safe drinking water as a fundamental human right. Simultaneously, she orchestrated the state's first water sector emergency declaration, unlocking critical resources, prioritizing interventions, and instituting robust accountability mechanisms within government structures.

Amaka's interventions exemplify policy-technical integration. Independent assessments across 17 Local Government Areas informed legislation and resource allocation. She applied behavioral economics in sanitation advocacy, achieving Open Defecation Free status for Igboetiti Local Government while linking hygiene practices to sustainable water quality outcomes. Her strategic guidance on water infrastructure led to the expansion of the 9th Mile Water Facility, increasing production capacity from 2,000 cubic meters/day to 120 million liters/day, directly improving water access for thousands of residents.

Her influence extends to multi-stakeholder coalition-building, bridging civil society, government ministries, traditional authorities, and communities. She integrates digital advocacy, monitoring frameworks, and institutional capacity strengthening, ensuring reforms are participatory, sustainable, and replicable. Internationally, she has positioned Nigeria as a leader in rights-based water governance, winning Best Scientific Oral Presentation at the XIX World Water Congress, Morocco 2025, and representing the country at the 10th World Water Forum and the All Systems Connect Symposium.

Amaka is driven by a deep conviction: "Access to safe water is not a promise; it is a right that must be codified, monitored, and enforced."

Her leadership demonstrates that scientific rigor, evidence-based advocacy, and bold policy innovation can achieve transformative outcomes for communities, institutions, and governments alike. Her other achievements include:

- Enacted Enugu State Water Law, legally recognizing water as a fundamental human right
- Led the first water sector emergency declaration in the state, unlocking resources and prioritizing interventions
- Expanded the 9th Mile Water Facility from 2,000 m³/day to 120 million liters/day
- Achieved Open Defecation Free status in Igboetiti Local Government
- Positioned Nigeria as a continental model for rights-based water governance, recognized internationally
- Won Best Scientific Oral Presentation at the XIX World Water Congress, Morocco 2025



1. Eng. Aché Tahar Sougoudi from Chad. Director General, National Water Laboratory.

1st Runner-Up, Policy and Advocacy Trail Blazer Category

Eng. Aché Tahar Sougoudi stands at the forefront of water governance and policy innovation in Chad and the Sahel, combining technical expertise, institutional leadership, and inclusive community engagement. As Directrice Générale of the Laboratoire National de l'Eau under the Ministère de l'Eau et de l'Energie, she champions national water quality regulation, sustainable resource management, and evidence-based policy, transforming access to safe water into a vehicle for resilience, equity, and empowerment. Over her distinguished career, she has coordinated the implementation of over 579 hydraulic structures, including wells, potable water stations, sand dams, spreader weirs, hafirs, and latrines; bringing reliable water to households, schools, health facilities, and livestock across Chad. Her leadership in programs such as PRAPS, PIRPT, PIDAC, SAN II, GERTS, PREPAS, and P2RS has strengthened communities' resilience against drought, climate variability, and conflict-related disruptions.

Aché approaches water governance with a philosophy that bridges technical innovation, institutional reform, and community empowerment. She has formulated national strategies for water regulation, shaped policy frameworks, and represented Chad in international forums including UN, UNFCCC, UNESCO, FAO, African Development Bank, Global Water Partnership, World Bank, CILSS, ABN, and BID. Her work has advanced transboundary cooperation and fostered shared water security across the Sahel.

Her innovations are practical and impactful: introducing solar-powered pumping systems, strengthening community water management committees, improving hafir construction, and establishing water quality certification standards. These initiatives integrate renewable technologies, participatory governance, and institutional standards creating models that are now referenced and replicated across Africa.

“Water quality reflects the strength of our institutions and the value we place on human life; it underpins public health, safeguards human dignity, and stands as our first line of defense against disease,” Eng. Aché asserts.

Through her career, millions of people now have improved access to safe water, while tens of millions of livestock benefit from reliable pastoral water sources. She has built the capacity of hundreds of local technicians and community cadres, reduced waterborne diseases, and strengthened rural resilience against environmental stress and drought. Her models for community management, certification standards, and multi-stakeholder governance have been adopted in national policies and operational practices, improving accountability and uptake of WASH best practices.

Aché prioritizes underserved populations, ensuring women, youth, and marginalized groups are fully represented in decision-making, committees, and training programs. By operationalizing the Leave No One Behind principle, she has transformed water access from a technical service into a tool for social inclusion and empowerment. Her leadership has also been formally recognized through her elevation to Chevalier de l'Ordre National, the 1st woman from the water sector to receive this honor. Her other Achievements include:

- Coordinated 579+ hydraulic structures, providing water to communities, schools, health facilities, and livestock
- Implemented multi-program initiatives (PRAPS, PIRPT, PIDAC, SAN II, GERTS, PREPAS, P2RS) impacting millions
- Introduced solar-powered pumps, improved hafir construction, and established water quality certification standards
- Strengthened community water management committees and trained hundreds of local technicians
- Prioritized women, youth, and marginalized groups in governance and training programs
- Recognized as Chevalier de l'Ordre National, first woman in the water sector to receive this honor



1. Practicing Eng. Orlane Bikai, Cameroon. Co-Founder, Bio Water Sarl Winner, Inclusive Innovation and Enterprise Category

At just 21, Orlane Elvir Bernadette Nemi Bikai stands as the Winner in Innovation & Entrepreneurship; representing a new generation of African engineers who refuse to separate technical competence from social transformation. Born in 2004 in Cameroon's Centre Region, she has rapidly emerged as a young water engineer and entrepreneur redefining access to safe drinking water in underserved communities.

Guided by integrity, boldness, resilience, faith, agility, and leadership, she operates at the intersection of water engineering, agro-industry, and inclusive enterprise as Co-Founder of BIO WATER SARL; a locally driven solution to Cameroon's potable water challenges. Her academic formation reflects both discipline and foresight. Trained at the École Technique d'Agriculture de Garoua, she earned a Brevet de Technicien Supérieur in Drinking Water Supply and Hydro-Agricultural Development, alongside a Higher Technician Diploma in Rural Engineering. She later advanced her studies in water and sanitation design at the Institut Supérieur d'Agriculture du Bois, de l'Eau et de l'Environnement at the University of Ebolowa. This multidisciplinary pathway equipped her with applied hydrology, rural infrastructure planning, and water treatment design expertise; grounding her innovation in engineering rigor.

Yet technical mastery alone was not enough. Confronted with the reality that millions of Cameroonians still lack reliable access to potable water many walking over three kilometres daily, relying on unsafe sources, or boiling water at high financial and environmental cost; she transformed knowledge into enterprise.

BIO WATER SARL produces and commercialises locally manufactured bio water filters designed for rural and peri-urban communities. At the core of the enterprise is the "Bio Filtre Rafraîchissant", protected under Patent No. 21673 by OAPI. The system integrates a: pre-cooling chamber for water conditioning, cooling chamber that preserves freshness and alkalinity and triple-purification ceramic cartridge combining ceramic filtration and activated carbon. The filter eliminates up to 99% of bacteria, chlorine, heavy metals, and impurities, while preserving essential minerals and improving alkalinity. Its internal architecture inhibits bacterial regrowth, ensuring sustained safety without electricity or chemical treatment- a critical feature for off-grid communities. From Vision to Viable Enterprise.

With 25 million FCFA mobilised through founder equity and strategic partnerships; including the Ministry of Youth (DIALYJ programme), the Cameroon SME Promotion Agency, WIDU Africa, UNESCO Central Africa, and the Ministry of SMEs- BIO WATER SARL transitioned from concept to semi-industrial production. Selection into the National Pilot Business Incubator strengthened governance, financial management, and operational planning. Today, the company employs: 8 full-time staff and 7 part-time collaborators.

Its hybrid model prioritises villages of more than 500 inhabitants located over two kilometres from the national water network; where waterborne disease prevalence exceeds 15% and household water expenditure surpasses 5% of income. By targeting excluded communities, the enterprise reduces preventable illness, lowers mortality linked to unsafe water, strengthens local supply chains, and advances the "Made in Cameroon" industrial ecosystem. Beyond business, Orlane mentors young women through seminars and outreach initiatives, advocating for greater female participation in engineering and water governance. Her recognition as Winner in Innovation & Entrepreneurship affirms not only a breakthrough product, but a scalable, youth-led model of locally engineered WASH solutions.



At 21, she is not waiting for change. She is designing it.

1. Dr. Joy Riungu, Kenya. Founder, Sanitation Research Institute (SRI-MUST)

1st Runner-Up, Inclusive Innovation and Enterprise Category

Dr. Joy Riungu is redefining sanitation in Kenya and across the region by closing one of the sector's most persistent gaps: the absence of locally grounded, practice-oriented research and the limited professional capacity required to translate innovation into inclusive service delivery. Through visionary leadership and institutional reform, she has elevated sanitation from an overlooked service to a professional, evidence-driven, and inclusive development priority. As Founder of the Sanitation Research Institute (SRI) at Meru University of Science and Technology (MUST), Dr. Riungu transformed the university into a national hub for sanitation training, applied research, and demonstration. By institutionalising sanitation education within academia while anchoring it in real-world service challenges, she successfully bridged the divide between research, policy, and community implementation. Since 2020, SRI-MUST has trained more than 600 sanitation professionals, including 61 MSc graduates, and launched PhD, MSc, diploma, and short-course programmes that strengthen Kenya's sanitation workforce. Dr. Riungu has secured over US\$ 10 million in research funding, supporting more than 25 MSc and PhD projects and producing over 20 peer-reviewed publications. Her commitment to equity is tangible—over 80 women and learners from resource-constrained backgrounds have received full scholarships, advancing gender inclusion in the sanitation profession.

In 2019, with support from the Newton Utafiti Fund, she pioneered a seeded-container-based faecal sludge management (FSM) system that enables safe onsite waste treatment and resource recovery. Designed for informal and peri-urban settlements, the system converts waste into valuable products, advancing circular sanitation in contexts often constrained by infrastructure and cultural barriers. A pilot serving 25 households demonstrated its viability and scalability. This innovation earned the 2025 Kenya Water and Sanitation Conference Innovation Award, reinforcing her role as a sector trailblazer.

Dr. Riungu further strengthened national capacity by establishing a state-of-the-art faecal sludge management laboratory, enabling applied research, product testing, and technical training. Her leadership extends into policy and regional engagement. As a Lead Trainer in City-Wide Inclusive Sanitation (CWIS) with the African Water and Sanitation Association (AfWASA) and UN-Habitat, she advises counties, utilities, and private-sector actors on inclusive sanitation strategies. She has contributed to sanitation curriculum development through the Global Graduate Sanitation School in collaboration with the University of Eldoret and Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology, ensuring that future engineers and practitioners are equipped with modern, practice-driven expertise.

Her partnerships with enterprises such as FreshLife and Sanivation demonstrate her ability to integrate public-private models into sustainable sanitation ecosystems. Through workshops in communities such as Mukuru kwa Reuben, she has embedded participatory learning approaches that empower residents while strengthening technical standards. Dr. Riungu's impact has earned national and international recognition, including the Newton Prize (2020), UN-Habitat Top 20 Innovations (2019), the IHE Delft Distinguished Alumni Award (2022), and the 2025 Sanitation Innovation Award. Her work has been featured across global platforms, reinforcing the visibility of African-led sanitation solutions.

At the core of her leadership is a clear conviction, “sanitation reform requires more than infrastructure; it demands knowledge, professional capacity, circular innovation, and inclusive systems working together.”

By professionalising sanitation, centering equity, and embedding research within community realities, Dr. Joy Riungu has reshaped Kenya's sanitation landscape and positioned African-led innovation at the forefront of global WASH discourse.



1. Hadi Touré Guindo from Mali. Co-Founder and President of AFR'EAU

Winner, Rising Star

Hadi Touré Guindo represents a new generation of African water leaders redefining governance through youth-driven innovation, scientific rigor, and community accountability. A Malian environmental engineer and Co-Founder and President of AFR'EAU (Association Formation Recherche en Eau), she has positioned citizen science and intergenerational dialogue at the heart of inclusive WASH reform across the Sahel.

With a Master's in Environmental Engineering from the University of Central Florida, Hadi combines technical expertise with grassroots engagement. She spent five years coordinating Water Operator Partnerships within Mali's national utility framework, strengthening operational performance, peer learning, and institutional cooperation. Simultaneously, she has lectured at ENI-ABT, mentoring future engineers and linking academia with public service delivery.

Under her leadership, AFR'EAU launched Dji Mansa, a youth-led citizen science initiative operating in Mali and Niger along the Niger River basin. The project integrates low-cost water quality monitoring with local knowledge, empowering communities as co-producers of evidence rather than passive beneficiaries. Over 160 community members, including women and young volunteers, have been trained as citizen scientists, collecting and analysing water quality data to inform safer household water practices and strengthen engagement with local authorities.

Hadi indicated, "Youth are not peripheral actors in the sector; they are architects of resilient, equitable, and climate-conscious water futures."

Her broader leadership focuses on systemic youth inclusion in WASH governance. As Co-Chair of the IWA Young Water Professionals Chapter Mali, she fosters mentorship and technical exchange. Through AJPEA Mali and the Young WASH Connect programme, she has trained over 150 young practitioners in technical skills, advocacy, and institutional engagement. She also mobilised financing and managed the SUFESEA mentorship programme, a seven-month initiative supporting women and students in the water sector.

Hadi's influence extends globally. She represented youth at the UN 2023 Water Conference and the UNESCO First Water Youth Dialogue 2025, advocating for structured youth participation in policy design and governance. As a Youth Advisor to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she bridges grassroots realities in the Sahel with international water diplomacy, ensuring that reforms are both locally grounded and globally informed.

Through Dji Mansa, Hadi has catalysed behavioural and institutional change: communities now question pollution sources, demand transparency, and participate in evidence-driven decision-making. Her approach demonstrates that youth-led, community-driven initiatives can scale, strengthen accountability, and deliver sustainable WASH services. Her other Achievements include:

- Trained 160+ community members as citizen scientists through Dji Mansa
- Collected and analysed 160+ water quality samples, informing safe water practices
- Trained 150+ young WASH practitioners in technical and advocacy skills
- Mobilised and managed the SUFESEA mentorship programme for women and students
- Represented youth at the UN 2023 Water Conference and UNESCO First Water Youth Dialogue 2025



1. Gloria Musopole from Malawi. Hydrogeologist, Baseflow Ltd.

Winner– Rising Star

In Malawi, where nearly 80% of rural communities depend on groundwater for daily survival, failure is not abstract, it is lived. Almost 1 in 3 rural water points fail, many permanently. For years, rehabilitation often meant guesswork: repairing pumps without diagnosing the underlying cause, only to watch systems break down again. Gloria Musopole knew that sustainable access required more than repairs. It required evidence.

“If we do not understand why a water point fails, we cannot claim to have fixed it,” Gloria guides.

In a field where women remain underrepresented, she quickly distinguished herself through technical precision, field leadership, and analytical rigor. Rising to Programme Associate– Hydrogeology, she helped develop and scale a diagnostics–driven methodology now widely recognized as Borehole Forensics. This unified framework integrates: Hydrogeological assessment, Water quality analysis, Borehole inspection, Pump diagnostics and Structured decision–making for rehabilitation. Gloria has personally supervised the drilling of over 40 boreholes and assessed more than 100 water points, applying stringent technical standards to ensure long–term functionality rather than short–term fixes.

Under the SADC–GMI sub–grant project, she played a leading role in revitalizing Malawi’s Groundwater Monitoring Network, expanding systematic data collection across the Shire River and Lake Chilwa Basin. By integrating telemetry systems with traditional observation wells, she improved data accessibility and strengthened evidence–based water resource planning. Through citizen science pilots in partnership with the University of Strathclyde, she trained community members in mobile data collection – embedding local ownership while improving the quality and reliability of hydrogeological datasets. The results have been measurable and transformative:

- 160+ borehole forensics assessments conducted
- Root causes of failure identified and evidence–based rehabilitation implemented
- Flood–proofing measures introduced for climate–vulnerable water points
- 50+ rural water points restored, providing safe water to over 35,000 people
- Inclusive design adaptations incorporated for people with disabilities, older adults, and pregnant women
- 600+ Water Point Committee members trained in governance, operation, maintenance, and financial management

These outcomes reflect systems thinking in practice linking infrastructure, governance, data, and community leadership. Gloria’s influence extends beyond Malawi. She has championed the adoption of Borehole Forensics across programmes supported by UNHCR, Habitat for Humanity, Self–Help Africa, United Purpose, and WaterAid, elevating standards and promoting replicable practices in groundwater management. Her work also reflects humanitarian innovation. In degraded prison facilities in Zimbabwe, she supported WASH interventions including biogas digesters, on–site chlorine production systems, and ventilation improvements integrating engineering excellence with dignity–centered design.

She says, “Groundwater is invisible but its management determines everything.”

Committed to expanding women’s participation in hydrogeology, Gloria mentors female professionals, challenges exclusionary norms in technical environments, and promotes inclusive leadership across engineering spaces. Her approach links WASH infrastructure to climate resilience, gender equality, governance reform, and sustainable resource management, creating durable systems rather than temporary solutions. Through innovation, technical rigor, and inclusive leadership, Gloria Musopole is redefining groundwater management in Africa. She is strengthening resilient water systems, elevating sector standards, and ensuring that communities can depend on safe water for generations to come.



1. Vivian Kamagenge from Tanzania. Community Health Manager at Water For Good

Winner, Rising Star

In rural Shinyanga, Tanzania, safe water was limited, sanitation infrastructure fragile, and childhood diarrhea a persistent threat. Open defecation was widespread, hygiene practices inconsistent, and communities lacked the systems needed to sustain change. For Vivian, solutions required more than infrastructure, they required integration of WASH, health, governance, and community leadership. With a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Disaster Management and a 1st-Class Master's in Community Economics Development, Vivian began her career as a Sanitation and Hygiene Officer. She advanced to Coordinator and later Community Health Manager, distinguishing herself early through a facilitative approach that prioritized local ownership over external delivery.

Vivian demonstrated that achieving and sustaining Open Defecation Free (ODF) status depended on more than triggering exercises. It required trust-building, structured capacity development, and alignment with local governance systems. At Water For Good, she now oversees integrated WASH and community health programmes across Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Cambodia, and the Central African Republic, guiding multi-country implementation with a systems-based lens. She designed and led the Vision of a Healthy Village model; an integrated framework combining: Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS), Expanded safe water access, WASH in schools and health facilities, Behaviour-change programming, Institutional strengthening of local government and community structures. Her strategy places strong emphasis on training frontline facilitators, embedding monitoring systems, and elevating women and youth into decision-making roles within community committees. Under Vivian's leadership, the Shinyanga Program achieved striking results:

- Healthy Home compliance increased from 0% to over 90% of households
- Sub-villages consistently achieved and sustained Open Defecation Free status
- Childhood diarrhea declined by a median of 90%
- Safe water access expanded to thousands of households
- Institutional sanitation improvements directly benefited thousands of students

To strengthen resilience, she introduced practical innovations including: durable handwashing systems to replace frequently stolen tippy taps, and adaptive behaviour-change strategies tailored to cultural norms surrounding hygiene, child feces management, and shared latrine use.

“Infrastructure alone does not change outcomes. Norms, leadership, and accountability do. We must design WASH systems that last,” notes Vivian.

Vivian's leadership reflects best practices in modern WASH programming: integrating infrastructure with social norm transformation, embedding systems within community governance, and using data to guide adaptive management. Her work demonstrates that sustainable outcomes emerge when technical design, behaviour-change programming, and local ownership function as a unified system rather than parallel efforts. Through her leadership, access to water and sanitation has expanded but more importantly, community capacity has strengthened. Women and youth have stepped into leadership roles. Monitoring systems have improved accountability. And a replicable model now informs programming beyond Tanzania. Vivian Victor represents a new generation of African water leaders; technically grounded, data-driven, community-focused, and globally engaged. Her impact extends beyond improved infrastructure. It is visible in healthier children, empowered communities, and systems built to endure.



1. Sakwe Mbone from Cameroon, Founder at She's STEM Foundation Winner, Indigenous Impact and Grassroots Champion

Sakwe powerfully remarked, “Sustainable water and sanitation solutions do not begin in boardrooms, they begin in communities.”

Sakwe's leadership is grounded in a simple but powerful principle: those most affected by WASH challenges must be at the centre of designing, implementing, and governing the solutions. Across her work in WASH and community development, Sakwe has consistently championed participatory models that bridge indigenous knowledge, lived experience, and evidence-based design to produce systems that are not only technically sound, but culturally relevant and locally owned.

Sakwe's approach moves beyond consultation toward co-creation. She works alongside rural and underserved populations to ensure that infrastructure planning reflects traditional water stewardship practices, social dynamics, and community priorities. By integrating indigenous systems with modern engineering and public health standards, she strengthens ownership, accountability, and long-term sustainability.

Her initiatives emphasise:

- Community-led planning and governance structures
- Context-sensitive WASH design rooted in local realities
- Capacity-building for grassroots actors to manage and sustain services
- Inclusion of women and marginalized groups in decision-making processes

“When indigenous communities are not just beneficiaries of change but its architects, the result is not short-term intervention, but durable community empowerment,” Sakwe told us.

Beyond WASH, Sakwe stewards a broader rural development vision through the She's STEM Foundation, advancing STEM education, protection and health justice programmes, and resilience-building initiatives in underserved communities. Through this platform, she supports girls and young women in accessing science and technology education, strengthens community awareness around health and protection issues, and fosters locally driven resilience strategies in fragile contexts. Her work demonstrates how water, education, health, and gender equity are interconnected and how strengthening one dimension reinforces the others.

Sakwe maintains, “Educating girls in STEM and securing safe water for communities are parallel commitments that together define the future we seek to build.”

Sakwe actively mentors young women, elevates community voices in national dialogues, and models a collaborative leadership style anchored in partnership rather than hierarchy. Her influence extends beyond projects to shaping narratives about whose knowledge counts and whose leadership matters. Her impact is defined not only by infrastructure delivered, but by confidence built, skills transferred, and voices amplified. Sakwe Mbone's work affirms a critical truth: sustainable community transformation does not emerge from external imposition. It grows from empowering grassroots actors, honoring indigenous strengths, and addressing structural challenges through inclusive, locally driven action.

Her leadership reminds us that lasting change begins where people are- and succeeds when they lead.



1. Yaye Fatou from Senegal. Founder, Yaye Fatou Enterprise 1st Runnerup, Indigenous Impact and Grassroots Champion

In Ziguinchor, Senegal, Yaye Fatou Ndiaye Diedhiou has built a model of change that begins in the marketplace and extends into the household. A social entrepreneur and community advocate, she has demonstrated that water, sanitation, hygiene, and economic empowerment are not separate priorities, they are mutually reinforcing pillars of public health and resilience. As Founder and Director of Yaye Fatou Enterprise, she has transformed local agricultural and natural products into safe, nutritious goods while embedding WASH principles throughout the production chain. From raw material handling to packaging and distribution, hygiene standards and safe water practices are integral, not optional.

“When women control safe production, they protect both livelihoods and lives,” Yaye mentioned

Yaye Fatou’s work bridges income generation and hygiene education. By integrating WASH awareness into enterprise development, she addresses food safety, sanitation practices, and nutrition gaps simultaneously; particularly among underserved women, rural households, and low-income families. Her impact includes:

- Training over 500 women in value-added processing techniques
- Reaching more than 500 households with sanitation and safe water behavior-change education
- Strengthening hygiene standards across local production and supply chains
- Building sustainable income pathways for women-led enterprises

Through structured training and mentorship, women acquire not only technical processing skills but also knowledge in safe water handling, sanitation standards, and public health protection. Yaye Fatou’s leadership extends beyond enterprise operations. She mentors emerging women entrepreneurs, collaborates with local farmers and small-scale producers, and fosters inclusive participation in community WASH initiatives. Her approach is culturally grounded, low-cost, and replicable- combining technical improvements in hygienic processing with social innovations that empower communities to take ownership of health outcomes. Workshops, hygiene campaigns, and partnerships with local organizations and microfinance institutions further reinforce sustainability. Central to her work is a clear commitment to inclusion. Women, rural households, and economically vulnerable groups are prioritized, ensuring that economic opportunity and safe water practices reach those most often excluded.

By linking entrepreneurship with WASH education, nutrition awareness, and responsible water management, Yaye Fatou has created a community-driven model that improves public health while strengthening livelihoods. Her work reduces waterborne disease risks, elevates hygiene standards, and builds economic resilience at the household level. It demonstrates that transformative leadership does not always emerge from large institutions- it often grows from grassroots initiative, cultural insight, and practical innovation. Yaye embodies indigenous leadership rooted in empowerment, dignity, and collective progress. Through enterprise, mentorship, and advocacy, she is shaping healthier communities and more resilient futures, one household, one woman, and one value chain at a time.



1. Dr. Esper Jacobeth Ncube (PhD, Pr.Sci.Nat.) from SouthAfrica. Manager, Process Technology, Rand Water

Winner, Lifetime Achievement

For over three decades, Dr. Esper Jacobeth Ncube has advanced water and sanitation engineering across Southern Africa and beyond- strengthening treatment technologies, shaping policy frameworks, mentoring professionals, and setting technical standards that underpin safe and sustainable water systems. Holding a PhD in Public Health, an MSc in Water Utilisation, and a BSc (Hons) in Chemistry; alongside professional registration as a Natural Scientist in Chemical Sciences and Water Resources Management- she brings scientific depth to complex challenges including water treatment optimisation, wastewater reuse, emerging contaminants, and sustainable water governance.

At Rand Water, she serves as Manager of Process Technology, leading investigations, technology selection, and process optimisation that safeguard water quality and operational efficiency for millions of consumers. Her leadership ensures that innovation is not theoretical- it improves real systems serving real communities.

Dr.Esper affirms, “Scientific rigor must translate into operational reliability. That is how public trust in WASH systems is built.”

Dr. Ncube’s influence spans research, regulation, and continental capacity-building:

- Over 25 years of publishing and presenting research at national and international forums (since 1998)
- Supervision of 7 PhD and 6 MSc graduates, now serving in senior academic and industry roles
- Co-founder and 10-year Chair of the WISA Reuse Division, advancing wastewater reclamation and reuse frameworks
- Chairperson of SABS TC 0224 for drinking water and wastewater systems standards
- Management Committee Member, IWA Disinfection Specialist Group
- Contributor to the AfWASA Strategic Technical Council and Regional Coordinator for its Capacity Development and Management Specialist Group
- Mentor to professionals across multiple African countries through the Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN)

Her work has shaped water reuse policies, authored position papers on wastewater reclamation, and strengthened technical guidance that informs water safety and sustainability across the region. She also participated in the IWA Water Development Congress, Bangkok 2025, contributing African expertise to a global platform convening delegates from 92 countries. Beyond technical excellence, Dr. Ncube is deeply committed to human capital development. She has mentored emerging women professionals, including through the Women in Water Mentorship Project, supporting water entrepreneurs who now operate successfully in South Africa. Within Rand Water, she is recognized as a business coach, fostering leadership development among engineers, scientists, and young graduates. Her supervision pipeline reflects long-term sector strengthening- building people who build systems. Her contributions have been recognized with honors including the Continental Lifetime Achiever Award (2015) for Most Influential Women in Business.

Dr. Esper Jacobeth Ncube’s career integrates science, governance, and mentorship. She has improved treatment processes, advanced wastewater reuse standards, guided regulatory frameworks, and cultivated a generation of professionals equipped to sustain progress.

Her impact is visible in safer water systems, stronger institutions, and empowered technical leaders across Africa. Through decades of dedication, she has demonstrated that sustainable water and sanitation services are built on three pillars: knowledge, standards, and people.

And she has strengthened all three.



1. Dr. Zodwa Dlamini from South Africa.

1st Runner-Up, Lifetime Achievement Award

Dr. Zodwa Dlamini's career stands as a landmark in Southern Africa's water governance history— a rare fusion of engineering oversight, diplomatic negotiation, institutional leadership, and social responsibility for 4 decades. For 11 years, she served as South Africa's Chief Delegate and Permanent Representative to the Bi-National Lesotho Highlands Water Commission (LHWC), the governing body overseeing the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP). During her tenure, she played a central role in steering the negotiation and implementation of the \$5 billion Phase 2 expansion, one of Africa's most complex and high-value transboundary water infrastructure programmes. The LHWP is more than a transfer scheme, it is a model of binational cooperation. Under her leadership, the system delivered: Construction oversight of the Katse and Mohale Dams, engineering benchmarks on the continent; Generation of 72 MW of hydroelectric power at the Muela Hydropower Station and Strengthened institutional coordination between Lesotho and South Africa through structured governance mechanisms Her stewardship ensured that large-scale infrastructure was matched by rigorous compliance, environmental safeguards, and accountable project governance— standards that positioned the LHWP as a continental reference point for transboundary water diplomacy, even before later mega-projects such as GERD.

Dr. Zodwa asserts, "Transboundary water management demands more than engineering. It demands trust, equity, and long-term vision."

Dr. Dlamini's leadership did not stop at dams and megawatts. She consistently advanced the integration of WASH and social development components within the project framework, ensuring that communities affected by infrastructure development were not sidelined. She championed community-centred water and sanitation programmes that expanded access to potable water, improved sanitation facilities, and introduced sustainable waste management systems in project-affected areas. Crucially, she supported the establishment of local water and sanitation committees trained in operation and maintenance— embedding long-term resilience rather than dependency.

Her work recognized that rural women, who often bear the heaviest burden when water and energy systems fail, must be direct beneficiaries of infrastructure investment. By linking technical execution with social accountability, she ensured that regional development translated into improved dignity and livelihoods at the community level. As a respected water diplomat, Dr. Dlamini has also shaped the leadership landscape for women in the sector. She is a founding member of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network (WWDN) and currently serves as one of three Co-Chairs of its Leadership Council. Through this role, she advances gender inclusion in high-level negotiations, leadership development, and WASH advocacy across Africa. Her mentorship extends across borders. She has guided emerging women professionals in water governance and diplomacy, actively promoting excellence and highlighting outstanding practitioners for continental recognition. Her advocacy underscores a simple but powerful conviction: sustainable transformation requires inclusive leadership at every level.

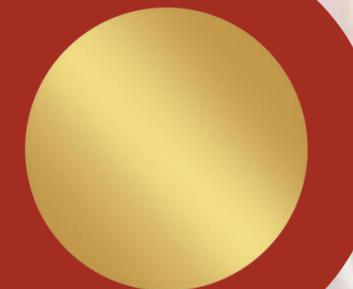
Dr. Zodwa Dlamini's career illustrates the integration of technical expertise, diplomatic acumen, and social commitment. From negotiating multi-billion-dollar agreements to embedding community-level WASH resilience, she has demonstrated that effective water governance operates simultaneously at regional, national, and local scales. Her legacy is visible in strengthened institutions, enhanced regional cooperation, empowered communities, and expanded leadership pathways for women in water diplomacy. Through her lifetime of service, water has become more than a shared resource under her stewardship; it has become a vehicle for cooperation, equity, and sustainable development across Africa.

"Lasting water security depends on institutions that reflect the people they serve," Zodwa closed.





Eng. Aché Tahar Sougoudi, Chad
1st Runner Up, Policy and Advocacy Trail Blazer Category
1st African Women In WASH Awards.



MENTORSHIP,
SPONSORSHIP
AND LEGACY

Recognition as a Beginning

Recognition is not the conclusion of the journey; it is the point at which greater responsibility begins. These Awards are designed to extend beyond celebration and function as a sustained leadership platform for Africa's water and sanitation sector. Winning signals trust; trust in an individual's ability not only to excel, but to help shape the direction of the sector going forward. Recognition therefore becomes a catalyst for continued influence, deeper engagement, and broader sector impact.

Mentorship, Sponsorship and Leadership Development

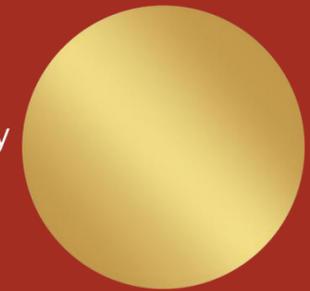
Awardees become part of an active network committed to continuity and growth. Through structured, cross-generational mentorship, winners will engage emerging professionals and rising leaders, creating space for practical guidance, knowledge exchange, and leadership development. This approach strengthens institutional pipelines, safeguards hard-earned expertise, accelerates innovation replication, and ensures that leadership succession is deliberate rather than accidental. Excellence, in this way, becomes shared, strengthened, and sustained.

Measuring Legacy and Long-Term Impact

To ensure that this commitment translates into measurable progress, future editions of the Awards will track the ongoing impact of awardees, from career progression and institutional influence to policy contributions, innovation scaling, and mentorship outcomes. By documenting these outcomes year after year, the platform evolves from recognition into documented legacy. The Awards therefore stand not only as a celebration of achievement, but as a mechanism for leadership continuity and long-term sector transformation.



Dr. Joy Riungu, Kenya
1st Runner Up, Inclusive Innovation and Enterprise Category
1st African Women In WASH Awards.



SPONSORS

We appreciate Our Strategic Sponsor, WaterAid.

Through financial investment, technical partnership, and high-level engagement, our strategic sponsor and partner, WaterAid, strengthened the reach, credibility, and continental influence of the African Women in WASH Awards. Their support enabled the elevation of women leaders onto a continental platform, ensuring that recognition translates into visibility, legitimacy, and sustained impact within the sector.

WaterAid's commitment to gender equality within Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) programming aligns deeply with the spirit and purpose of these Awards. Their work recognises that inadequate access to safe water and sanitation disproportionately affects women and girls, who bear the burden of unpaid labour, face heightened safety risks, and encounter barriers to education, health, and economic participation.

By integrating gender-responsive and climate-resilient approaches, WaterAid moves beyond infrastructure provision to address structural inequalities. Their initiatives reduce the time women and girls spend collecting water, promote safe and accessible sanitation facilities, advance menstrual hygiene management with dignity, and support women's participation in community-level water management and decision-making structures. Through evidence-based advocacy and gender-responsive budgeting, they ensure that investments directly benefit women and girls while challenging social norms that perpetuate inequity.

WaterAid's gender-transformative approach seeks not only to improve access to services, but to reshape the systems that determine who leads, who benefits, and whose voices are heard. In supporting these Awards, WaterAid demonstrates that investing in women's leadership strengthens governance, enhances service delivery, and advances sustainable development across Africa.

We extend our sincere appreciation to WaterAid for standing with this movement; not only as a sponsor, but as a committed ally in advancing equitable, inclusive, and resilient WASH systems for the continent.



OUR
COMMITMENT
MOVING
FORWARD

As we draw this inaugural Women in WASH Awards booklet to a close, we celebrate more than individual achievement; we celebrate a movement of women transforming Africa's water, sanitation, and hygiene sector. Each awardee represents courage, innovation, and leadership that inspires communities, institutions, and peers alike. These Awards mark the beginning of a continent-wide story of recognition, visibility, and impact, proving that women's leadership is not symbolic, it is transformative across systems, societies, and economies.

Where women lead, governance strengthens. Where governance strengthens, water systems become resilient, inclusive, and sustainable. Where water flows, communities thrive, economies grow, public health improves, and quality of life rises. The achievements documented here show that investing in women is investing in systems that work, communities that prosper, and a continent that achieves its Sustainable Development Goals for all.

This first edition is a historic milestone, but it is also a launchpad for continued innovation, mentorship, collaboration, and sectoral change. By recognizing leaders who deliver measurable impact, the Awards provide a benchmark for excellence, a networking platform for sector professionals, and a catalyst for sustainable, gender-equitable systems. They invite investors, partners, and stakeholders to join a movement where support translates into lasting social, economic, and environmental returns.

To our extraordinary winners and nominees: your work strengthens the sector, inspires the next generation, and sets the standard for excellence in WASH across Africa. To partners, supporters, and the wider community: your belief and collaboration have made this milestone possible. Together, we continue to amplify women's voices, scale leadership, and shape a resilient, equitable, and inclusive water future for the continent.

Let this booklet serve as a source of pride, inspiration, benchmarking, and action a record of achievement today and a promise of what is yet to come. Together, we are not just celebrating excellence; we are shaping the future of WASH in Africa, where women lead and communities flourish.

Do you know any woman in WASH pls reach us.

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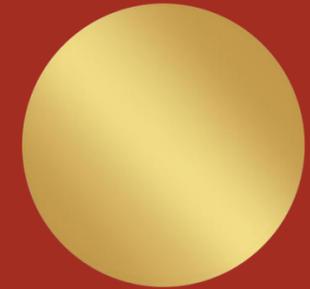
Euphresia Luseka, Robai.Matsi@hotmail.com

Leticia Ackun, Lackun@afwasa.org

Founders, African Women In WASH Awards

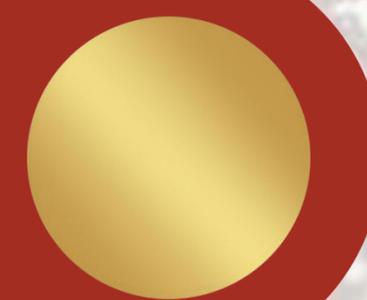


Yaye Fatou Ndiaye, Senegal
1st Runner Up, IndigenousImpact and Grass roots Category
1st African Women In WASH Awards.





Thank you
Merci
Asante
شكراً
Agradecemos



African Water and
Sanitation Association

Association Africaine de
l'Eau et de l'Assainissement

AfWASA / AAEA

