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World Water Day

World Water Day 2017: Turning Wastewater into a Source of Wealth in Africa

By Jennifer Blanke, Vice-President, Agriculture, Human and Social Development, AfDB

Maimuna Nalubega, Water Supply Engineer, AfDB

David Akana, Communications Expert, AfDB

Wastewater may not be a major hot-button issue of our time. It generally does not attract the same attention as concerns about inequality, poverty, climate change, gender inequities, and other global challenges. But as this year's [World Water Day](#) reminds us, wastewater is one of the unresolved development challenges facing rapidly growing African cities.

Many countries in Africa identify water and sanitation as one of their national priorities and its good management offers tremendous untapped opportunities to achieve green and inclusive growth and poverty alleviation in Africa and elsewhere. Whether Africa will succeed in providing sanitation and clean water to the hundreds of millions of underserved Africans, thus massively improving the quality of life of Africans, will depend both on the scale of wastewater management services and how they are delivered.

The African Development Bank has over the past five decades sought to achieve development outcomes and ensure value added investments in its wastewater and sanitation programs. Since 1968, when the Bank financed its first water project, it has gone on to approve about 360 loans and grants with a total financing volume of approximately US \$7 billion.

The Bank is adopting an [integrated urban water management](#) approach to promote a holistic vision of water and sanitation management. The management of liquid and solid waste is thus viewed as productive and income-generating activities. The Bank and the [African Water Facility](#) are currently funding programs using this transformative and innovative approach in five African cities including [Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo](#) and [Marondera in Zimbabwe](#). This ensures the safe collection, treatment, transportation, and reuse of the by-products to improve the quality of life of the poor in select urban areas. Similar programs are being prepared for five other African cities.

Public Private Partnerships in Wastewater? Absolutely!

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the sanitation sector has long been viewed as a loss-making burden. Against this backdrop, private sector investments have not gained much traction. And yet as we know, water and sanitation is big business in more advanced economies. And development finance can simply not achieve these goals alone. What is needed is a shift in mindset. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) can help to develop a market for sanitation services and products and may bring a wide range of benefits. A recent [evaluation](#) showed that these include greatly improved service, income, and the development of products to treat sludge.

PPPs may also help to ensure the sustainability of wastewater and sanitation programs. Furthermore, the same evaluation highlighted the need for effective community participation in order to enhance ownership and to make the improvements sustainable. Lack of stakeholder ownership often leads to weak project design. Going forward, the Bank will seek to analyze further the role and opportunities for greater collaboration with the private sector in delivering these critical services. These partnership paths have immense potential to accelerate wastewater management efficiently, affordably, and sustainably in our cities. The **Sanitation Atlas**, currently under preparation in collaboration with the [United Nations Environment Program](#), will provide further guidance in better leveraging private sector opportunities.

Wastewater and the urbanization challenge

Rapid urbanization in Africa's sprawling cities such as Lagos, Dakar, Cairo, Johannesburg and Nairobi raises the stakes when it comes to wastewater and sewage management. The urban population of Africa is projected to reach 654 million by 2030 up from 320 million people in 2010. Wastewater management infrastructure in urban areas is largely insufficient and investment is not keeping pace with rapid urbanization. The annual global shortfall in funds (between 2002 and 2025) for municipal wastewater treatment is estimated at [US \\$56 billion](#).

Climate change, slow uptake of innovation and technologies and limited capacities of institutions further exacerbate the problem. If urban sanitation challenges are not tackled urgently, it will put urban residents, especially 200 million inhabitants of marginalized and informal settlements at risk of contracting cholera, dysentery, typhoid, polio, and other waterborne diseases.

The possibilities of exploiting wastewater are substantial. However, political commitments by governments are critical for this to happen. Results may become visible only over the long haul. Wastewater management and sanitation projects tend to be complex and challenging. But the costs of wastewater management are substantially outweighed by economic benefits associated with improved human health, economic development, and environmental sustainability.

As we celebrate World Water Day, let us seize the opportunity to raise awareness and take bold, decisive and urgent action together to address wastewater management intelligently.

Some other articles relevant to World Water Day

- [Zimbabwe Urgent Water Supply and Sanitation Rehabilitation Project \(project brief\) / News story](#)
- [Mozambique Feasibility study on Urban Sanitation, Drainage and Solid Waste Management](#)
- [African Water Facility Turns Waste into Commercial Fertilizer and Energy, While Improving Sanitation Services for the Urban Poor, in Ghana](#)
- [A Business Approach for Improved Sanitation in Ghana – Organic Fertilisers and Energy as Drivers \(Appraisal report\) / PowerPoint Presentation](#)
- [Water Drinking Project in Mozambique](#)
- [Rwanda: Water from over the Hills](#)
- [Water for a better life](#)
- [Water and Sanitation Project in Mozambique](#)

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