

Report on the 15th GIMAC and UN Women Youth Advocacy Training by Rebecca Karungi

In Conjunction with the African Union

Venue: Haile Grand Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Dates: 5th – 9th February 2026

Theme: Youth Leadership and Policy Advocacy for Gender-Responsive Water and Sanitation in Africa

Opening Session

The program began with an opening prayer, the Ethiopian national anthem, and introductory remarks. UN Women was represented by delegations from Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, and Niger.

Dr. Hellen Kenzie Nwoha, Chairperson of the GIMAC Network and Team Leader at Researchers Without Borders, delivered the first keynote address. She emphasized the importance of moving from commitment to action in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and Africa's Agenda 2063. She highlighted financing and accountability as critical components of this journey.

Madam Doris Mpoumou, UN Women Special Representative to the African Union and UN Economic Commission for Africa, gave the second keynote address. She focused on the theme of access to clean water and proper sanitation, stressing that *“justice can't wait—especially justice for water and for girls across Africa.”* She reminded participants that poor sanitation denies dignity and challenged the audience with the question: *“How many people here have running water?”* The response revealed that most participants did not, underscoring the urgency of the issue. She tasked every woman and youth present to take ownership of the WASH initiative, as they represent the future of Africa.

Group Discussions and Key Reflections

Participants engaged in group discussions to identify practical actions aligned with the theme. Youth delegates agreed that without focus and commitment, the goals of Agenda 2063 would not be achieved.

Key reflections included:

- Water is essential for economic development; no progress can be made without it.
- Girls are disproportionately affected by water scarcity. Lack of water impacts menstrual hygiene, causes absenteeism from school, and perpetuates gendered burdens such as fetching water.
- The Maputo Protocol (Article 15) on women's rights was discussed, with emphasis on climate change and climate justice.

Challenges Identified

Participants highlighted several barriers to achieving WASH justice in Africa:

- **Corruption:** Mismanagement of funds intended for WASH projects.
- **Lack of technical knowledge:** Communities often lack skills to operate and maintain equipment.
- **Low prioritization of girls:** Cultural biases undermine girls' access to sanitation and education.
- **Weak legal frameworks:** Limited awareness of legal avenues to report violations affecting girls.

Advocacy and Policy Engagement

Discussions also focused on gender-responsive WASH policies and the role of youth in advocacy. Participants were guided to move from community voices to continental action by:

- Interpreting key data and developing persuasive advocacy messages.
- Highlighting statistics such as the 400 million people in Africa lacking access to safe drinking water.
- Addressing weak budgeting and limited gender-sensitive monitoring indicators.

Mr. Elvis, one of the facilitators, emphasized the importance of advocacy skills for young women and introduced the **ABC Method**:

- **A – Audience**
- **B – Behavior**
- **C – Change**

This framework was used to design advocacy plans with clear problem statements and policy requests.

Conclusion

The training concluded with a powerful reminder: “*WOMEN in full is well-organized men.*” The statement underscored that without women’s leadership, the world loses meaning. Women have a central role to play in driving change, particularly in advancing gender-responsive water and sanitation policies across Africa.