

## STATEMENT

# Day of the African Child: Faith Actors as Catalyst Towards Positive Norm Change

Africa Gender Justice Community of Practice, June 2026

*The ACT Alliance Africa Gender Justice Community of Practice convened a regional dialogue bringing together faith actors, practitioners, and partners to reflect on the lived realities of children across the continent and the urgent need to address systemic WASH inequities, harmful gender norms, and barriers to justice. Grounded in their deep community presence and critical ethical voice, participants collectively affirmed the unique role of faith actors as catalysts for positive norm change, shaping attitudes, influencing policy engagement, and fostering community-led solutions. This statement emerges from those shared reflections and commitments, rooted in a faith-inspired call to justice, dignity, and care for the most vulnerable.*

**We**, the ACT Alliance Africa Gender Justice Community of Practice, members of ACT Alliance, a global faith-based coalition organized in national and regional forums operating in more than 120 countries. Through more than 160 members, we work together for humanitarian response, gender and climate justice, migration and displacement, and peace and security to support local communities.

**We affirm** that the inclusion of civil society perspectives, particularly those of faith-based actors, is essential to ensure inclusive, sustainable, and rights-based development cooperation, trade, and business relations.

**Aware** that faith-based actors play a critical role in many African societies, often acting as first responders in humanitarian crises, and long-standing agents for peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion.

**With deep roots in local communities**, offer unique insights, legitimacy, and access in hard to-reach areas where state institutions may be absent.

**We highlight that WASH is recognized as a human right**, as per the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children, and the African Union Agenda 2063, Sustainable Development Goals under SDG 6.1 and 6.2

**We call for the accelerated implementation to achieve universal access to water by 2030**, as per the United Nations and would require an accelerated implementation plan by the African Union and that the African Union declared 2026 as the Year of Water and Sanitation.

**Many children across Africa continue to face deep-rooted structural barriers**, while progress has been made gaps remain, including inadequate and unsafe WASH facilities in schools and

communities, gendered social norms that limit access and dignity, increased exposure to violence and harassment and weak or inaccessible justice and reporting mechanisms.

**Recognizing that these barriers are interconnected and disproportionately affect girls and marginalized children**, limiting their health and well-being, educational opportunities, safety and bodily autonomy and ability to seek justice and claim their rights. Lack of safe and dignified WASH services is therefore not only a development challenge but also a human rights and justice issue. Addressing these gaps requires shifting from high-level commitments to practical, gender-responsive, and justice-oriented solutions that break systemic barriers and ensure accountability at all levels.

**We are concerned that inadequate WASH services continue to expose children to violence**, abuse and exploitation, while accessing water and sanitation facilities thus undermining their dignity, health and mental wellbeing, and that water insecurity reinforces poverty and exclusion.

**Especially recognize** that girls are disproportionately affected by inadequate sanitation and menstrual hygiene facilities, with women and girls spending 250 million hours daily collecting water thus limiting their education, safety, participation, and equal opportunities.

**On this commemoration day of the African Child, we call upon African States to:**

**1. Institutionalize Gender-Responsive WASH Budgeting**

Mandate a minimum, protected percentage of national and regional budgets for child-sensitive, gender-responsive Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services. Fund menstrual health management (MHM) and safe sanitation to improve school retention, ensure safe participation, and unlock children's full potential.

**2. Guarantee Private Sanitation**

Enforce standards for safe, private, and menstrual-friendly sanitation facilities in all schools and communities.

**3. Standardize and Subsidize Menstrual Hygiene Products**

Prioritize the rights of the girl child by establishing strict national quality standards for sanitary pads. Ensure these essential commodities are safe, regulated, highly affordable, and accessible to eliminate exclusion and vulnerability to violence.

**4. Engage Faith and Community Leaders to Combat Stigma**

Establish formal partnerships with faith leaders, families, and educational institutions. Deploy community led programs to dismantle menstrual stigma, break silence on child vulnerability, and foster local ecosystems rooted in justice and respect.

**5. Enforce Tech Company Accountability**

Legislate rigorous compliance mechanisms that hold technology companies operating within member states accountable for child safety. Enforce zero-tolerance penalties for online abuse to prevent the digital exclusion of children from education and public life.

**6. Eradicate Geographic and Demographic WASH Disparities**

Implement targeted equity interventions to close the WASH access gap between rural and urban populations. Prioritize specialized infrastructure for Children with Disabilities (CWDs) and those living in fragile, conflict-affected, and marginalized settings.

**7. Institutionalize Child-Led Co-Creation and Decision-Making**

Embed mandatory mechanisms for children, particularly girls, to meaningfully participate in policy formulation. Treat their inputs as core standards to co-create affordable, dignified, and sustainable WASH solutions.

**8. Mandate the Creation of Holistic Safe Spaces**

Establish comprehensive physical and digital safe spaces across schools and communities. Ensure these areas are fully equipped to protect children from abuse, support mental well-being, and nurture leadership potential.

**9. Establish an African Union WASH Accountability Mechanism**

Develop a rigorous oversight framework and peer-review remedy system under the African Union. Hold member states directly accountable for the timely implementation, monitoring, and reporting of national WASH interventions.

We urge the African Union and its Member States to move from declaration to immediate implementation.