



On June 25, 2020, Speak Up Africa held the second conversation of the **Virtual Bridges** series with an insightful conversation with Dr. Canisius Kanangire, Executive Secretary, African's Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) on WASH and COVID-19.

In this conversation, the Executive Secretary of AMCOW gave an update on the importance of access to sanitation in the Covid-19 context, provided a high-level overview of the post Covid-19 world for sanitation, the changes and challenges, and presented the Africa Sanitation Policy Guidelines.

## Background

- 54 African States (out of 55) have reported 383,747 cases of COVID-19 and almost 10,000 deaths have been reported across the continent.
- According to the Joint Monitoring Program 2019 report by UNICEF and WHO, in Sub Saharan Africa 83% of healthcare facilities have no water services, 80% have no sanitation services and 49% have no hygiene services.
- Multiple factors leading to poor sanitation services (holistic approach, coordinated actions, sense of urgency).
- Lack of clarity in sanitation policies and institutional responsibilities.
- Inadequate legal framework and regulations.
- Inadequate financing and unclear cost recovery mechanisms.

## Below are some of the key takeaways from the conversation:

- The African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW)'s mission is to support Member States in achieving water, sanitation and hygiene related targets through political leadership, policy direction and advocacy. **Evidence-based** decisions are impactful: one of AMCOW's main priorities is to promote knowledge driven policy and decision-making processes in the water and sanitation sector with strong monitoring and evaluation. **Sanitation** needs dedicated attention: the sector can only be developed through coordination between sector actors and a multi-sectoral approach.
- 45% of the African population live without basic water services, and 55% without safely managed water services. 60% of the African population live without access to sanitation services and 61% of the African population have no access to handwashing facilities on premises.
- Poor access to WASH services impact health, economies and development prospects. We know handwashing with soap is the most efficient way of stopping the spread of Covid-19; yet vulnerable populations lack access to water, sanitation and hygiene and are most exposed to the virus. We need to pay special attention to marginalized and vulnerable populations to ensure **inequities** are reduced in the sector. It is crucial to increase financial allocations supporting sanitation and hygiene policies and decision to ensure no one is left behind.
- Partnerships are important – to overcome this pandemic and make Africa more resilient to crises, it is important to have a **stronger coordination** and synergy at country, regional and continental levels.



In the sanitation and hygiene sector, experts and professionals are focused on the fecal sludge management aspect, leaving behind important issues such as liquid/solid waste, menstrual hygiene management which has an incidence on other development aspects such as education. Young girls, especially in rural areas struggle to manage menstrual hygiene resulting in a drop in education rates. That is why the Africa Sanitation Policy Guidelines (ASPG) initiated by AMCOW includes a specific component on menstrual hygiene management to ensure women and girls' needs are accounted for. We need to all, both men and women, take responsibility in solving challenges related to menstrual hygiene management.



Access to safe water: many Africans still do not have access to water in their homes and live with the burden of fetching water every day. That is a challenge, especially when Covid-19 safety measures recommend regular handwashing, confining and physical distancing. These measures are difficult for vulnerable populations to implement. AMCOW has played a role in showing that Covid-19 is not only a public health matter because without access to safe water in homes, it is nearly impossible to effectively comply with safety measures. We need to bring water in homes and work with financial institutions to ensure we have access to necessary emergency funds to solve these issues.

In conclusion, access to water, sanitation and hygiene is a matter of partnership and coordination. With synergies at country, regional and continental levels, Africa can become resilient, fight Covid-19 and be better prepared for crises. A strong political will and commitment is necessary to ensure African populations live healthy and dignified lives with access to safely managed sanitation and hygiene. AMCOW will call on countries to use their shared resources and work together to ensure cooperation prevails beyond any other efforts. Peace, cooperation, well-being of populations should be the priorities and this will be possible if we, as African work in a brotherly way.

**Stay tuned for our next Virtual Bridges Conversation!**