
Charting a New Course: Strengthening WASH for a Sustainable Future in Southern Africa

Remarks by: Mr. James Nkamba Chifwelu | National Director

Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, and Friends,

It is an absolute honour and privilege to host the 2024 Southern Africa Region Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Forum. On behalf of World Vision Lesotho, I extend our warmest greetings to each of you as we come together for a forum that is central to improving the health, dignity, and well-being of children and communities across our region.

This gathering marks a significant milestone as we reflect on the progress made under the current WASH Business Plan, which has guided us since its launch in 2010/2011. Over the years, these forums have provided invaluable opportunities for reflection, recalibration, and forward planning. With the end of our current WASH Business Plan in 2025 on the horizon, we are at an exciting juncture as we begin to shape the next phase of our journey—the FY26–FY30 WASH Business Plan.

I'm proud to say that together, we have made incredible progress over the past five years. We've installed taps, built toilets in communities that had none, improved hygiene practices, and supported children and families by providing access to something fundamental: clean, safe water. Our efforts have directly contributed to Sustainable Development Goal 6, ensuring that no child or community is left behind when it comes to water, sanitation, and hygiene.

However, as we gather today, we must also acknowledge the severe challenges posed by the current El Niño crisis. Lesotho, along with other parts of Southern Africa, has been particularly hard-hit by drought conditions. The declaration of a national disaster due to food insecurity emphasizes how climate events like El Niño profoundly impact access to water and basic necessities for our most vulnerable communities.

In times of crisis, the importance of WASH cannot be overstated. Access to clean water is critical not only for health and hygiene but also for food security and sustaining livelihoods. When water sources run dry, communities become more susceptible to disease outbreaks, malnutrition, and displacement.

This is where our WASH programs play a vital role. By ensuring that communities have resilient and sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene systems, we can help mitigate the impact of climate change and weather-related crises like El Niño. WASH interventions are not just about access to water; they are about building long-term resilience. By integrating faith, community engagement, gender equality, and social inclusion into our WASH programs, we can ensure that the most vulnerable—especially children, women, and people in fragile contexts—are not left behind.

This year's forum presents a unique opportunity to collectively discuss and refine the vision, technical approaches, and key fundamentals that will shape our WASH strategy for the next five years. As we plan national-level design workshops across the region in FY25, this forum serves as a critical space for collaboration, sharing insights, and ensuring that our field offices are well-prepared to implement our ambitious goals.

As we launch our FY26–FY30 WASH Business Plan, our commitment remains steadfast. We will continue to accelerate universal and equitable access to WASH services, with an even deeper focus on the most vulnerable. We will work to demonstrate sustainable impact and actively mobilize the financing needed to ensure that every child, every family, and every community has access to clean water, safe sanitation, and better hygiene.

As we gather here in Maseru, we are reminded of the immense responsibility we carry. WASH interventions are at the heart of our mission to improve children's lives and build healthier communities. Safe water, adequate sanitation, and proper hygiene are not just essential services; they are foundational human rights and integral to achieving our vision for a world where every child can thrive. WASH plays a strategic role in leveraging impacts across key sectors—education, health, and livelihoods—allowing us to address poverty holistically.

As we look toward the future, I encourage us all to think creatively, challenge ourselves to find innovative solutions, and remain steadfast in our commitment to the most vulnerable. By working together, we can ensure that no child or community is left behind in our efforts to provide safe and sustainable WASH services.

Through forums like this, we have the opportunity to share best practices, learn from one another, and set strategic priorities that will shape the future of WASH in Southern Africa. To our colleagues from Angola, DRC, Eswatini, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and beyond—thank you for your presence and dedication. Your contributions, perspectives, and experiences are vital to shaping the new WASH Business Plan, and we look forward to learning from each other throughout this forum.

Finally, I want to express my deep appreciation to all of you for your unwavering commitment to the WASH agenda and for making the journey to Lesotho. I hope that during your time here, you will engage in productive discussions and experience the beauty and culture of our country.

Once again, welcome, and let us make this forum a defining moment as we prepare to take bold steps toward a healthier, more sustainable future for the children and communities we serve. Thank you for being here, for your dedication, and for the vital work you are doing in your countries. Let's use this week to plan, collaborate, and ensure that our work has a lasting impact on the lives of the children and communities we serve.

**Thank you.
Khotso. Pula. Nala**