



**CONCEPT NOTE FOR  
3<sup>RD</sup> AFRICA WSS REGULATORS CONFERENCE**

*Theme: Adaptive Regulation-Addressing Emergent Issues*

**23-27 SEPTEMBER 2024, SUNBIRD MOUNT SOCHE-BLANTYRE, MALAWI**

**1. BACKGROUND**

The Eastern and Southern Africa Water and Sanitation (ESAWAS) Regulators Association is a regional network of water supply and sanitation (WSS) regulators that seeks to enhance the regulatory capacity of members to deliver quality and effective regulation to achieve public policy objectives through cooperation and mutual assistance.

ESAWAS is registered under the Societies Act Cap 119 of the Laws of Zambia and is governed by a constitution ratified among the members. The seat of Secretariat is Zambia and is hosted by the member, NAWASCO. The activities of ESAWAS are guided by three-year Strategic Plans.

Currently, ESAWAS has twelve members which are institutions with the responsibility for water supply and sanitation regulation from Kenya, Tanzania, Zanzibar, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Mozambique, Lesotho, Malawi, Angola and South Africa.

Since 2007, ESAWAS has held an annual conference that brings together regulators to deliberate on issues to enhance WSS regulation and service provision. From 2022, the regional regulator's conference evolved to a continent-wide gathering of institutions with primary WSS regulatory responsibilities from across Africa. The **Africa WSS Regulators Conference** endorsed by ESAWAS Members, non-members and partners has become a standing platform for knowledge and experience exchange towards strengthening and promoting effective WSS regulation, among regulatory institutions within Africa and across the globe. **The 3<sup>rd</sup> Africa WSS Regulators Conference is thus scheduled for 24-26 September in Blantyre, Malawi.**

**2. BRIEF REVIEW OF PREVIOUS CONFERENCES**

**2.1 1<sup>st</sup> Africa WSS Regulators Meeting:** In pursuit of Strategic Objectives, particularly to 'Strengthen and expand the Africa continental reach of ESAWAS', in 2022, ESAWAS held a monumental first-ever gathering of all institutions with the mandate for WSS regulation from across Africa. About 150 persons comprising 44 countries and 8 cooperating partners attended the conference.

The meeting held in Zanzibar from 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> November 2022, was officially opened by the Second Vice President of Zanzibar, under the theme “*Changing the narrative for WSS Regulation Across Africa: Strengthened Sector Accountability*”.

The meeting highlighted a number of areas of mutual interest and challenges among the different regulatory institutions that could be tackled at a continental level and provided the motivation for a second Africa WSS regulators conference.

## 2.2 2<sup>nd</sup> Africa WSS Regulators Conference:



The 2<sup>nd</sup> Africa WSS Regulators Conference was held in Uganda from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and officially opened by the Minister of Water and Environment in Uganda. It was attended by more than 150 participants from 44 African countries and over 18 partners supporting regulation.

The 2023 Conference theme was “*Initiatives for regulatory impact*”. The conference was an opportunity to showcase various initiatives instituted by regulators, policy-makers and stakeholders to address sector challenges and create positive lasting impacts in the WSS sector through effective regulation. The conference also served as a podium for gathering evidence on the beneficial role of regulation by demonstrating its impact on WSS service provision.

## 3. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PAST CONFERENCES

The 1<sup>st</sup> Africa WSS Regulators Conference held in 2022 flagged two priority needs at continental level: (i) establishment of a dedicated Africa based WSS regulation training centre and (ii) a platform for a single voice for stronger advocacy for WSS regulation.



In this line, two major outcomes of the 2023 conference were (i) the endorsement of the feasibility strategy to establish a dedicated Africa-based WSS Regulation Training Centre under ESAWAS and (ii) resounding endorsement of the strengthening and widening of the purview of the ESAWAS Regulators Association to the Africa continental level with continued focus on promoting and strengthening effective WSS regulation.

Other key issues recommended for action included, among others:

- Strengthening regulatory tools for data collection and management;
- Development of regulatory frameworks for rural and off-grid WSS
- Service resilience and emergency preparedness for sustainability should be at the forefront
- Need to support and incentivise regulatory compliance – including rewarding best performers;
- Enhancing technical capacity development through the training centre

#### 4. 2024 THEME – ADAPTIVE REGULATION: ADDRESSING EMERGENT ISSUES

While the world is progressing to achieve SDG 6 targets on universal access to water supply and sanitation, Africa is lagging behind all. According to the 2022 WHO/UNICEF JMP report, between 2000 and 2022, the population of Africa has increased from 812 million to 1.43 billion. Yet, 411 million people in Africa still lack basic drinking water service and 779 million lack access to basic sanitation services. Significant inequalities persist between and within countries, including between urban and rural, and between sub-national regions. JMP estimates that achieving universal coverage (>99%) by 2030 will require a 23x increase in rates of progress for safely managed sanitation and a 12-fold increase in current rates of progress on safely managed drinking water.

The progress to meeting SDG targets and sustaining improvements post-SDGs is affected by emergent issues that apply pressure on the WASH sector. These include:

- **climate change** effects that are impacting water and sanitation access, causing service disruptions and raising the need for efficiency in water use. The security of the food-water-energy nexus is also at risk.
- Increase in the frequency and severity of health **pandemics** that has raised demand for the availability and reliability of water and sanitation services.
- Rapid rural to urban **population migration and growth** against limited and inadequate existing infrastructure, in addition to evolving upgrades of rural areas, calls for increased capital investments and efficient management of systems.
- Proliferation of **deconcentrated informal service providers** that are trying to fill the gap where Utility/Municipal services are still absent, require professionalization in service delivery.
- Slow uptake of **digitalization and technology** advancements that have the potential to improve service operations and close data gaps.
- Economic downturns and **fiscal stress** experienced by many countries is waning even the current insufficient investments towards WASH.



More than halfway to the SDG targets, the time for accelerated action is crucially urgent. **Water supply and sanitation (WSS) regulators are faced with a challenging task** to drive improvements in WSS services in the realm of these emergent issues, among others. It has long been said that regulation must be dynamic – this means having an **adaptive approach** to regulation that adjusts and adapts as the environment changes. Appropriate regulation is critical for achieving effective operational efficiency and management in WSS service provision.

**The 2024 theme, ‘Adaptive Regulation: Addressing Emergent Issues’ is thus intended to highlight how regulators are adapting regulation in the face of emergent issues for resilient, sustainable, affordable and professional WSS services.** This includes learning, modifying or changing regulatory approaches in response to (and to be suitable for) new situations. Adapting regulation requires putting in place mechanisms that can mitigate negative effects, while taking opportunity of positive influencers to drive improvements in WSS services.

## 5. SUB-THEMES

The conference will be held over three days (24-26 September) and the programme will aim to encompass the following sub-themes:

Sub-Theme	Description <i>(not exhaustive)</i>
<b>Service Resilience and Emergency Preparedness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The regulatory role in supporting resilient services in sector responses to shocks and stresses that include climate change, economic, pandemics, population migration, aging and limited infrastructure etc</i></li> </ul>
<b>Rural WSS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Regulatory frameworks and service delivery models for Rural WSS</i></li> </ul>
<b>Off-grid/Non-networked WSS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Regulatory frameworks and service delivery models for Off-grid water supply and non-sewered sanitation</i></li> </ul>
<b>Sector Financing and Commercial (Business) Orientation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The role of the regulator in attracting / unlocking investments for WASH including private sector</i></li> <li>• <i>Supporting/promoting commercial/business orientation in management of WSS services</i></li> </ul>
<b>Sector monitoring and Data Systems Strengthening</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>WSS Sector systems that improve regulatory and utility operations by closing data gaps e.g. digitalization, GIS, benchmarking, data tools, enterprise systems etc</i></li> </ul>
<b>Service Provider-Regulator Engagements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Platforms for regulators and regulated for consultation, co-learning, capacity-development and feedback on issues affecting the sector</i></li> </ul>

## 6. CONFERENCE STRUCTURE

<b>Day One</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening Ceremony – <i>officiated by high-level Government official</i></li> <li>• Key speakers – <i>AMCOW, AfWASA, AfDB</i></li> <li>• Keynote presentation – <i>technical expert on: regulation vs emergent issues</i></li> <li>• Plenary: Technical Presentations with Q&amp;A</li> </ul>
<b>Day Two</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plenary: Technical Presentations with Q&amp;A</li> </ul>
<b>Day Three</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-hour x 3 No. hosted side-events in thematic areas               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sector Governance</li> <li>○ Sector Financing</li> <li>○ Sector Monitoring/Systems</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## 7. KEY DATES

Activity	Deadline
Call for Papers Open	1 <sup>st</sup> May
Call for Papers Closed	30 <sup>th</sup> June
Confirmation of presenters and programme	26 <sup>th</sup> July
ESAWAS Executive Committee Meeting (internal)	23 <sup>rd</sup> September
<b>Conference</b>	<b>24-26 September</b>
AGM (for members)	27 <sup>th</sup> September