Water Sector Trust Fund
Financing the Water Sector
1st Floor, CIC Plaza I, Mara Road, Upper Hill, Nairobi, Kenya
PO Box 49699 Nairobi-00100; Tel: +254 (20) 2720696, 2729017/8
Email: info@waterfund.go.ke; Website: www.waterfund.go.ke

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ENG. ERIC MUGAA, CS MWSI, CALLS FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN WATER ACCESS DURING THE 2026 WORLD WATER DAY CELEBRATIONS

Every year, the world celebrates World Water Day, an annual United Nations (UN) observance held on 22nd March since 1993. This serves as a platform to advocate for sustainable water management policies, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation for all). In line with this global observance, the 2026 theme, "*Gender and Water,*" with the slogan "*Where Water Flows, Equality Grows,*" underscores the critical link between equitable access to water resources and the advancement of gender equality.

In Kenya, the Ministry of Water, Sanitation and Irrigation (MWSI) in collaboration with water sector institutions joined the rest of the world in celebrating the 2026 World Water Day at Mwerongundu Primary School, in Meru County. As the water sector, the celebration provided an opportunity to highlight ongoing initiatives, share knowledge with communities, and inspire collective action toward gender-responsive water management.

Eng. Eric Mugaa, Cabinet Secretary, MWSI, presided over this year's celebrations as the chief guest. He was accompanied by Mr. Julius Korir, CBS, Principal Secretary (PS) for the State Department for Water and Sanitation, Eng. SAO Alima, Water Secretary, MWSI and other senior government officials. In his keynote address, Eng. Mugaa acknowledged that Kenya remains a water-scarce country. The annual per capita freshwater availability stands at approximately 405 cubic meters, which is below the global benchmark for water security.

He emphasized that this reality makes investment in water infrastructure not just important, but essential. Despite these constraints, he noted that Kenya has made steady progress. The national water coverage currently stands at 74%, while access to safely managed sanitation services reaches 40.9%, meaning millions more Kenyans now enjoy safe water and sanitation. The CS underscored that the Government is scaling up investments in water infrastructure across the country. These efforts include dams, groundwater development, water harvesting systems, and the expansion of water supply networks.

Speaking during the celebrations, Mr. Julius Korir, PS, State Department for Water and Sanitation, called for greater women's involvement in water governance. As a result, this will promote a transformative, rights-based approach to water management, where women's voices and leadership are fully recognized. Furthermore, Mr. Ephantus Kimotho, PS, State Department for Irrigation, called on all stakeholders to engage in tree-planting initiatives, emphasizing that every tree planted helps protect water catchment areas and secures Kenya's water future.

WaterFund's Participation in the WWD Celebrations

To mark the occasion, Water Sector Trust Fund (WaterFund) hosted an exhibition where staff educated the public about its mandate and ongoing interventions in Meru County under the Conditional Liquidity Support Grant (CLSG) II programme. Leading the team was the CEO, Mr. Willis Ombai, who interacted and networked with stakeholders while emphasizing the Fund's commitment to improving water access and sanitation.

WaterFund played a key role in the success of World Water Day by planting 500 indigenous tree seedlings and 500 fruit tree seedlings at Mwerongundu Primary School, while also distributing 500

branded umbrellas to participants and students. WaterFund's participation in the event was instrumental, as it provided a strategic platform to advance the Water and Gender theme by promoting inclusive and equitable access to water services. It also enabled residents of Meru County to gain deeper insight into the Fund's projects, while fostering meaningful engagement, knowledge exchange and the sharing of innovative solutions to address water challenges.



Eng. Erick Mugaa, CS Ministry of Water, Sanitation and Irrigation (MWSI), delivering his keynote address



Mr. Julius Korir, CBS, PS, State Department for Water and Sanitation,MWSI, addressing the guests



Mr. Ephantus Kimotho, CBS PS, State Department for Irrigation, MWSI, making his remarks



Mr. Willis Ombai, CEO WaterFund, leading the tree planting exercise



Ms. Linda Gwada, Principal Corporate Communication Officer, during the tree planting exercise



Students from Mwerongundu Primary School participating in the tree planting exercise







WaterFund staff engaging with stakeholders at the exhibition booth during the 2026 World Water Day celebrations



Left: Stakeholders at WaterFund's exhibition booth

Right: WaterFund branding at Mwerongundu Primary school during World Water Day celebrations



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