

Synopsis of the Status of Key Development Statistics in Africa

Water Statistics

Motivation and Objectives

Water statistics are essential for allocating a resource that supports households, agriculture, industry, ecosystems, and climate resilience. However, national production is fragmented across institutions and remains weakest for the measures that require hydrological monitoring, administrative returns and water accounts. This has created heavy reliance on international estimates that may be modelled from sparse national inputs, lag behind current conditions or conflict with countries' own figures, limiting national ownership and effective planning.

The brief has three objectives: (i) assess the production and dissemination of water statistics by African countries; (ii) examine the availability and consistency of water statistics within and across international outlets; and (iii) review the methods and institutional arrangements used by statistical systems that have institutionalized water statistics, as a reference for African countries.

Highlights of the Status of Statistics

1. Nineteen African countries have never submitted the UNSD/UNEP water questionnaire, and only ten responded in 2024. Of the 35 countries that have ever submitted, 15 have the latest data predating 2018; the continental median is 2020.
1. No questionnaire statistic is compiled by even half of African countries. Coverage ranges from 22 countries for utility-supplied water to six for untreated wastewater, while the median country reports only 17 of 96 expected variables.
2. Only 14 countries publish an identifiable national water-statistics product, and just seven continue. Four of the six countries that compiled water accounts discontinued them; only two accounts remain current, and Uganda alone produces one annually.
3. Nineteen African countries implement a System of Environmental Economic Accounting module, but only six compile regularly: 32.0 percent of African implementers, compared with 95.0 percent in Europe and Northern America. Household surveys cover basic water and sanitation in 53 of 54 countries, while national reporting covers renewable resources in 12, agricultural abstraction in nine and untreated wastewater in six.
4. The WHO/UNICEF and World Development Indicators drinking water and sanitation series are identical across 4,250 matched observations. Conversely, in 87.0 percent of 549 water stress observations, the World Bank value is exactly twice FAO's, changing classifications for five countries.
5. For 232 matched country-year observations in 19 countries, national freshwater abstraction figures differ from international values by a median of 25.0 percent; 54.0 percent differ by more than 20.0 percent, with no published reconciliation.