

# CALL FOR ACTION

## We **C.R.A.V.E.**

**C**ommit **R**ecognise **A**ct **V**alorise **E**ngender

## **#JustSanitation4AfricanCities**

### SUMMARY OF POINTS

1. Localised action, and democratic decision making, learning and monitoring
2. Gender equality and leadership across the sanitation service chain
3. Binding climate and sanitation action and justice
4. The right to sanitation for all forms of tenure
5. Decent work for paid and unpaid sanitation workers
6. Inclusion as a basis for fair access to & control over adequate sanitation services
7. Networked off-grid sanitation systems
8. The redistribution of resources across the sanitation chain, with inclusive and diverse financing mechanisms
9. Sanitation to promote healthy outcomes for people and the environment
10. Circular systems to reduce waste and enhance food and energy security

### Preamble:

**We, the undersigned**, representatives, leaders and change agents from a diverse community of civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, local governments, research institutions, private sector and utility providers across Africa, are committed and well-positioned to embrace the challenge of building equitable sanitation for women and men across urban Africa. Having gathered in Nairobi, Kenya from the 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> of September, 2023 for the Regional Meeting of the research project “OVERDUE: Tackling Sanitation Taboo Across Urban Africa”, we hereby launch this urgent collective call for action to Commit, Recognise, Act, Valorise and Engender (C.R.A.V.E) just Sanitation in African cities, as a means of localising SDG6, and accelerating the realisation of all SDGs.

We hereby ...

1. **Reaffirm**, the African Minister’s Council on Water [Ngor Declaration](#) (2015) that aims to achieve universal access to adequate and sustainable sanitation and hygiene services and eliminate open defecation by 2030 and UN General Assembly’s declaration ([76/300](#)) that access to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a universal human right (2022).

2. **Recognise**, the gendered dimensions of the rights to water and sanitation, and the need to eliminate all forms of discrimination, promote equal access and to protect, support, and build capacities and aspirations of women and girls as sanitation users, as enshrined in both the [Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) (CEDAW) (1979), and the [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa](#) (Maputo Protocol 2003).
  
3. **Further recognise**, the importance of universal access to safe adequate sanitation for all as enshrined in the UN General Assembly Resolution [70/169](#) on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation (2015) and specifically for children, as enshrined in the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (1989) and the need to eliminate all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities, as enshrined in the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (2006).
  
4. **Support**, commend and align with continental efforts to improve access to improved water and sanitation across Africa, including the [Africa Water Vision for 2025: Equitable and Sustainable Use of Water for Socioeconomic Development](#) (2000), the [Sharm El-Sheikh Commitments for Accelerating the Achievement of Water and Sanitation Goals in Africa](#) (2008); and the African Union's [Agenda 2063](#).
  
5. **Concerned**, that while African open defecation prevalence rose by 6% between 2021-2022 and is now at nearly 20% of the population, and the delivery of safely managed sanitation services is yet to reach over 800 million people in the continent, only 12% of the annual Water and Sanitation (WASH) budgetary allocation of the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) member states is estimated to be spent on sanitation, and 1% on hygiene, with the remaining 87% spent on water supply ([AMCOW 2022](#)). At the same time a bias remains towards grid sanitation solutions, despite the reality that only 8% of the African population are connected to sewers ([AMCOW 2022](#)), and policy visions do not record or valorise the existing investments that individuals and communities have made to off-grid sanitation infrastructure. Furthermore, despite policy recognition of the need for community-led engagement and of gendered inequities, sanitation is still primarily presented as a technical challenge of managing "access to and use of facilities and services for the safe management of human waste across the sanitation service chain" ([AMCOW 2020](#)) with gendered and social dimensions treated as secondary issues of access rather than as constituents of the sanitation service chain.

6. **Convinced**, that sanitation is a critical lifeline for African cities and a key vehicle for gender equality.

Public commitment and collective action by state and non-state actors are essential to realise sanitation as a human right and to accelerate the realization of the SDGs (SDG 6, with significant impacts on SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, and 13).

Improvements towards inclusive and just sanitation services massively benefit those currently disadvantaged in relation to sanitation, including the urban poor, particularly disadvantaged groups, including women, children, migrants, and people with disabilities.

## Call for Action

### We **C.R.A.V.E** Just Sanitation for African Cities

We call on the global community to act with urgency, to mobilise support for localising SDG6 with a feminist lens, and to forefront the needs, capacities and aspirations of women and girls as sanitation users and providers across the sanitation service chain, by addressing the following ten points:

#### 1. **Localised action, and democratic decision making, learning and monitoring**

Safe sanitation for all, and the adequate management of waste and resources, are anchored in SDG6 as well as the 2015 Ngor Declaration, and other regional and national commitments. The localisation of these agendas is essential to provide contextual responses to realise the right to adequate sanitation, and to overcome the inability of universalist approaches to reach the urban poor. The COVID 19 pandemic has shown the capacity of local actors to lead on urgent action to protect health through transforming sanitation practices. Localisation to support such action requires the commitment to recognise, value, support and upscale the many innovative and incremental local interventions that already improve access to adequate sanitation across African cities.

Linked to this, systems of democratic decision-making, public learning and monitoring ensure that responsibilities for policies and practices are adequately allocated and shared, and that knowledge about their impacts is collectively generated by the diverse actors involved in the sanitation chain. This is crucial to improve sanitation interventions in response to evolving needs, as well as to provide transparency and accountability, and cater for inclusivity. Furthermore, they are essential for enabling cross-city and cross-actor learning in a field that is still dominated by donor-led interventions, as well as by a limited set of technical professions.

In this context, we call for:

- The anchoring of the major sanitation commitments in the experience and knowledge of grassroots sanitation actors;
- Local and national governments to realise their mandates, and make available adequate, and timely, resources, to deliver sanitation as a human right in their cities;
- Public channels to be opened and sustained for organised civil society to coproduce just sanitation, through democratic governance processes such as Participatory Budgeting and Gender Responsive Budgeting;

- Inclusive and meaningful participation in democratic decision-making structures related to sanitation, at all levels, and the development of integrated sanitation action plans that take climate change into consideration;
- Structures that foster co-learning between different sanitation actors across all levels/scales;
- The valorisation of and support for community-led evidence collection and knowledge on sanitation needs and experiences.

## 2. **Gender equality and leadership across the sanitation chain**

Gender inequalities are produced and reproduced through every step of the sanitation service chain. An intersectional feminist perspective demands viewing women, in all their diversity, as more than sanitation users, but also as workers, providers and leaders. This requires paying attention to unequal gender roles, women's physiological differences, economic status, as well as power and leadership. Among other actions, advancing gender equality across the sanitation chain requires: accounting for women and girls' need to urinate more than men, recognising that menstruation and pregnancy increase the frequency of the need to use toilets; addressing the risk of sexual harassment when going to the toilet; making visible the taken-for-granted and unpaid household sanitation work conducted by women and girls; recognising women's work as skilled, expert labour in sanitation work, and; ensuring women's parity of political participation in decision-making on sanitation issues.

In this context, we call for:

- Women's diverse voices to be heard in the sites of power where decisions are made about sanitation;
- Men to pursue gender equality as allies in the pursuit of just sanitation;
- The recognition of women's unpaid sanitation work in public policy, and a challenge to policy and public discourses which treat this as a natural and unrewarded 'duty' for women;
- Diverse women to produce, and have access to, the information that they need to steer decisions about sanitation;
- Women Members of Parliament (MPs) and other elected leadership positions to drive legislation on Just Sanitation, with the support of male MPs/ elected leaders who are committed to gender justice;
- Capacity building for diverse female leadership in the sanitation sector and for mainstreaming intersectional gender analysis into all sanitation decision-making.

### **3. Binding climate, sanitation action and justice**

In urban Africa, most lower income communities not only live far from the sewage grid; they make homes in areas characterised by challenging topographies and high-water tables. Thus, climate change and environmental burdens disproportionately affect the urban poor, not only because they inhabit areas exposed to hazardous conditions such as localised flooding, but because they face more limitations than others to cope with, and recover from, negative events. Unsafe and inadequate sanitation is exacerbated by, and contributes to, unhealthy environments; for example, untreated faecal sludge contained in precarious latrines is highly susceptible to the destruction of mudslides and rockfalls, resulting in pollution of water sources and public health outbreaks. Binding action on climate and sanitation justice therefore requires simultaneously providing sanitation benefits related to health, well-being and livelihoods, and seeing action on sanitation as essential for climate adaptation, mitigation, as well as loss and damage funding.

In this context we call for:

- Climate finance for local government and local non-state actors to develop climate-smart and gender-sensitive sanitation interventions;
- The empowerment of local communities to hold state actors accountable on climate and sanitation commitments;
- The valorisation of and support for community adaptive capacities for sanitation in the context of climate change;
- Networking on climate and sanitation justice at the regional level.

### **4. The right to sanitation for all forms of tenure**

The realisation of the right to sanitation is deeply interlinked with land and tenure security. This is because the provision and maintenance of infrastructures depends on the availability of suitable land, as well as the capacity of owners and tenants to make investments. Action on this point, on the one hand, requires making land available not only for sewer systems and conventional treatment plants, but also for faecal sludge treatment plants and more flexible systems that respond to the prevailing conditions in informal settlements by connecting off-grid sanitation facilities through, for instance, simplified sewerage systems. On the other hand, it means addressing existing inequalities embedded in property systems and making sure that women and men living in compounds or as tenants can also realise their right to sanitation, paying particular attention to marginalised groups such as female tenants, whose rights to sanitation are disproportionately denied.

In this context, we call for:

- The recognition of the central role of land and tenure in the realisation of sanitation rights for all urban citizens;
- Sanitation policies and procedures that guarantee the right to sanitation across all forms of land and housing tenure;
- Community-driven advocacy (CSOs & CBOs) and State action to secure the land required for collective sanitation infrastructure and facilities along the service chain;
- Landlords and landowners to be formally required to guarantee tenants' access to decent sanitation facilities;
- City planning processes that recognise and accommodate off-grid sanitation infrastructure as critical;
- An evidence base on the relationship between tenure and access to decent sanitation.

#### **5. Decent work for paid and unpaid sanitation workers**

Realising the right to sanitation requires recognition of the everyday-makers of sanitation – that is the women and men, who work on an unpaid and paid basis. Action is particularly needed to redress the tendency for paid roles to be held by men and the unsafe and inadequate conditions in which sanitation work is performed. Simply put, women provide the bulk of unpaid sanitation services at household and neighbourhood level while men take on income-generating sanitation jobs and valorisation processes. Moreover, bold action is required to secure decent conditions for sanitation work, which – although being skilled and high-risk work – is often heavily stigmatised, underpaid, lacking social security, and at times even rendered illegal by inappropriate legislation, leading to negative impacts on the health, social status, well-being and livelihoods of workers.

In this context, we call for:

- The recognition of the value of (paid and unpaid) sanitation work across the sanitation service chain in delivering a public good;
- Measures to ensure the dignity, health and safety, social protection, and fair wages for all sanitation workers;
- The extension of labour rights, entitlements, and protection to unpaid sanitation workers, in line with paid sanitation workers;
- Disaggregated data to give evidence on the impact of unequal gendered sanitation work.
- A transformation of the gendered norms around the care economy, that cast unpaid sanitation tasks as women's work towards a fairer distribution between genders in households and communities;

- The decriminalization of sanitation workers and the vital work that they do in cities supported by the development of sanitation guidelines and procedures that apply to the reality of off-grid sanitation arrangements;
- The promotion of legal literacy of sanitation workers and their collectives on their rights to support their collective bargaining to access their rights to decent work;
- The promotion of wider public awareness on the rights of (paid and unpaid) sanitation workers to decent work;

## **6. Inclusion as a basis for fair access to & control over adequate sanitation services**

Access to the full range of sanitation infrastructure and services is shaped by needs and capacities that differ across gender, class, age and ability. Unequal access to sanitation results in loss of dignity, ill-health, environmental degradation, and exposure to violence, including sexual violence, and exacerbates existing inequalities, especially along lines of gender, disability and class. Action on this point demands the reversal of prevailing interventions: rather than forcing sanitation users to cope and adapt to facilities conceived as universally adequate, we strive towards the provision of adequate services that reflect the needs and aspirations of the full range of different users. This demands inclusive sanitation facilities design, construction, rehabilitation and management, which needs to take an intersectional approach. This can be achieved through the active participation of sanitation users and workers across the full sanitation chain, paying specific attention to inclusive systems of governance and approaches to financing and maintenance at different scales – from the city to the household.

In this context, we call for:

- Equal access to, and availability of, sanitation facilities, with no discrimination;
- The expressed sanitation needs and aspirations of migrants, refugees, and displaced people to be met;
- The expressed sanitation needs and aspirations of women and men with disabilities to be met;
- A commitment to respecting cultural and religious diversity in communities, while recognizing and addressing its impact on sanitation practices and rights;
- Participatory design and construction of sanitation facilities, with the full range of users;
- Community education and awareness about the need for inclusive sanitation, which addresses exclusionary sanitation taboos and stigma;
- Disaggregated data revealing intersectional gender patterns in sanitation needs, to inform decision-makers and communities;
- Public learning from grassroots demonstration projects of inclusive sanitation infrastructure.



## **7. Networked off-grid sanitation systems**

Sanitation investments are urgently needed in the off-grid systems that dominate in many cities in Africa. For instance, in Freetown, Beira and Mwanza, the gridded underground sewerage network reaches only 0.3%, 10% and 23% of the population respectively. The number of inhabitants living far away from the grid is high, which means that replacing the off-grid system with network extensions is neither an immediate nor long-term option for them. Yet, most donor funds are allocated to capital investments for repairing and extending the (more expensive) grid. Action on this point demands breaking this bias, connecting grid- and off-grid systems and making sure that off-grid systems are networked across the entire sanitation service chain, thereby stopping the treatment of off-grid sanitation facilities as a household responsibility.

In this context we call for:

- Investment in off-grid sanitation, serving the urban poor, by national and local governments, with finance and support from multi- and bi-lateral agencies;
- The development of effective mechanisms to connect off-grid and on-grid sanitation systems and management;
- Off-grid sanitation infrastructure to be engraved into city (sanitation) plans, compelling the development of legal frameworks, regulations and minimum standards for off-grid sanitation, and monitoring of their application;
- Research on and development of affordable and adaptable off-grid sanitation systems, including faecal sludge management at household level, and sanitation related income generation.

## **8. The redistribution of resources across the sanitation chain, with inclusive and diverse financing mechanisms**

The prevailing investment bias towards gridded sewage networks fails to reach the majority of the urban poor across Africa. For investments to make meaningful strides towards just sanitation, they need to be fairly distributed and guided by more inclusive considerations including the need to mobilise finance progressively. Actions on resource redistribution emphasise that just sanitation does not only require *more* financial resources, but a different use, allocation and control over them, and their progressive mobilisation.

At the same time, financial mechanisms must provide for the diverse needs and capacities of sanitation users and providers. Action on inclusive financing focuses on coordinating and strengthening co-financing mechanisms, such as innovative

revolving sanitation funds that provide households and collectives with affordable loans to finance sanitation improvements throughout their life cycle. Moreover, actions are urgently needed for those who are particularly marginalised and unable to finance their sanitation improvements, especially in contexts where sanitation is predominantly tackled as a household responsibility.

In this context, we call for:

- Dedicated budgets for local government to address the sanitation needs of poor urban woman and men, including accessible finance mechanisms to support low-income residents' sanitation investments;
- The recognition that sanitation workers are as important as infrastructure, which should be reflected in resource allocation;
- Tariff restructuring to subsidise the development of off-grid systems and to regulate sanitation service charges;
- A multi-sector partnership approach to diversify sanitation finance and investments, linking sanitation finance to other sectors such as health, environment, infrastructure or education;
- Integration of binding just sanitation criteria (gender, inclusion and climate considerations) in public procurements issued along the sanitation chain at national and local levels.
- Transparency on the use of public funds for sanitation;

## **9. Sanitation to promote healthy outcomes for people and the environment**

Promoting healthy outcomes first requires recognising the manifold links between (poor) health and (inadequate) sanitation. These include a spectrum, such as the widely known link between open defecation and diseases like cholera and diarrhoea, but also lesser-discussed negative impacts, such as mental health issues, the stress and mental overload experienced by women and girls who look after sanitation systems day in and day out, or the practice of substance abuse that often occurs in heavily stigmatised sanitation work such as manual pit emptying. Furthermore, working towards healthy cities requires the adoption of a caring approach, enabling woman and men to benefit from adequate sanitation as a means to care for themselves, their neighbourhoods and environments.

In this context we call for:

- Improved coordination of the activities of all actors acting on environmental and sanitation issues;
- A socio-economic, environmental and financial cost analysis of the impact of just/unjust sanitation;

- Sensitization programmes targeting different groups of stakeholders on the impact of just sanitation on health and the environment.

## **10. Circular systems to reduce waste and enhance food and energy security**

Given the high proportion of people and communities that rely on off-grid sanitation across urban Africa, closing the loop practices are essential for public health, environmental management and sustainable urban development. Action on this point pushes us towards creating circular urban systems and governance structures that support the treatment and recovery of sanitation outputs, thereby reducing waste as well as re-using sludge as a valuable resource that can re-enter energy and food chains and contribute towards enhanced food and energy security. However, doing so requires addressing taboos around faecal sludge and fears and biases related to the circular economy.

In this context we call for:

- Opportunities and capacity for sanitation users to close the loop, using decentralised nature-based solutions such as bio-digesters in their homes and communities;
- The valorization of sanitary waste as a resource, and a basis for income generation;
- Cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration, linking sanitation products and processes to energy, urban agriculture, infrastructure, enterprise, solid waste recycling, and other relevant sectoral concerns;
- Popular and formal education on faecal sludge recycling and closing the loop;
- Documentation and dissemination of successful closing the loop initiatives.

## Endorsements to the **Call for Action**

### We **C.R.A.V.E** Just Sanitation for African Cities

**We the undersigned confirm our endorsement of and commitment to the Call to Action: Just Sanitation for African Cities and invite others to endorse it because #JustSanitation4AfricanCities is long OVERDUE!**

1. Funmi Adeniyi for Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) Abuja, Nigeria
2. Adriana Allen for DPU/OVERDUE / Habitat International Coalition (HIC) London, UK
3. Jaona Lalaina Andrianaivo Ravoavy for Antananarivo Commune Antananarivo, Madagascar
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5. Hon. Milka Moraa Areba for The Network of Local Women Elected in Africa (REFELA) Mombassa, Kenya
6. Hon. Jean Mugabo Bakele for Ibanda Municipality Bukavu, DRC
7. Moises Charova Chenene for Beira Autonomous Sanitation Unit (SASB) Beira, Mozambique
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12. Winfred Indakwa for At The Heart of A Woman / Habitat International Coalition (HIC) Nairobi, Kenya
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18. Angele Koue for GEPALEF Abidjan, Ivory Coast
19. Hon. Maria Helena Langa for The Network of Local Women Elected in Africa (REFELA) Mandlakazi, Mozambique
20. Hon. Rohey Malick Lowe for The Network of Local Women Elected in Africa (REFELA) Banjul, The Gambia
21. Mary Lubelwa Aloyce for Mwanza Federation of the Urban Poor Mwanza, Tanzania
22. Abdul Marah for Freetown City Council Freetown, Sierra Leone
23. Juliet Mekone Sale for United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLGA) / REFELA Accra, Ghana
24. Aida Mbaye Ep Dieng for St Louis Municipality / Senegalese Government Saint-Louis, Senegal

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