

GLOBAL WATERS RADIO

Canisius Kanangire and Richard Rapier on Strategic Planning for Africa's Water and Sanitation Sectors

Interview Transcript

Global Waters Radio: You are tuned in to Global Waters Radio, a podcast series produced by the Water Team at the U.S. Agency for International Development. The series offers listeners insights from USAID officials, development partners, thought leaders, and experts from across the water sector, as they discuss current USAID water programming and cutting-edge research from around the world.

This week on the podcast, a conversation with both Dr. Canisius Kanangire, Executive Secretary of the African Ministers' Council on Water, and Richard Rapier, Chief of Party for the USAID-supported Water for Africa through Leadership and Institutional Support program. Dr. Kanangire has served as Executive Secretary of the African Ministers' Council on Water, better known by its acronym [AMCOW](#), since September 2016. AMCOW is a Specialized Committee for Water and Sanitation for the African Union, and Dr. Kanangire has used his position to help align the efforts of more than 50 top water officials from across Africa in their push for improved water and sanitation. Our second guest today, Richard Rapier, has over 15 years of experience in the water, sanitation, and hygiene sector, as well extensive experience with regional and national water institutions across Africa. Today, he leads the Water for Africa through Leadership and Institutional Support program, better known by its acronym [WALIS](#), which has recently collaborated closely with AMCOW to help create its continent-wide strategy for improving water and sanitation between now and 2030.

GWR: So Dr. Kanangire, tell our listeners some more about your role with AMCOW. For some of them, this may be the first time they have heard of the Council, so can you describe the relationship between AMCOW and the African Union?

Canisius Kanangire: My name is Canisius Kanangire. I'm the Executive Secretary of AMCOW, the African Ministers' Council on Water. The relationship between AMCOW and the African Union is that, starting in 2008, the head of states, when they get the mandate to AMCOW to provide political leadership, to provide policy directions, and also to carry out advocacy for sustainable development of water resources in Africa. They also instructed the African Union to consider AMCOW as a Specialized Technical Committee on water and sanitation for the African Union, so we are advisers on those technical matters.

GWR: In terms of knowledge sharing, why is it strategically important that AMCOW provides a forum for collaboration between Africa's water ministers?

CK: For the whole continent, we need ministers to get together to discuss, to agree on the ways they will conduct business in the water and sanitation sector. That will also enable the African Union to have an opportunity where some countries will learn from their peers, because in Africa, like elsewhere in the world, there are countries who progress more and better than others. So they can learn from one another.

But also, Africa is a very particular type of environment where you have more than 60 transboundary waters. And when it comes to managing and developing those resources, you need the countries to come together and to agree on how to manage the resources and how to plan for the development and how they would share the benefits which will accrue from that development, and transform or utilize that situation as a catalyst for more cooperation rather than more conflict around water resources.

We think that by bringing ministers together, it will be easier to promote the learning processes and also the adoption of new technologies, which are very important to borrow from other continents, and mainly in the area of sanitation services.

GWR: What would you say are some of the most pressing water and sanitation challenges that AMCOW is seeking to address with its 2018-2030 strategy that WALIS helped support the creation of?

CK: If we start with water, I would say one of the issues is that we are very vulnerable to drought and to floods. And that is because we have not invested much in water storage and water development. And we think that is an issue that we need to put very high on the agenda.

Second, Africa uses groundwater for domestic water in all the countries. And sometimes we really overuse that resource. And yet, groundwater is not much given much attention, in terms of establishing mechanisms for good governance and good resource management planning, and development. We have many cases where we have imbalance between obstruction and recharge. And also we have cases where we have pollution.

Third is, we have many transboundary waters. How do we strengthen the institutions working on transboundary waters, river basin organizations, lake basin organizations, and ensure that we are not only using the water, but how do we also conserve the ecosystems which preserve those resources, which prevent high-level pollution, which prevent the drop of levels of lake, and the drying up of some of the rivers? So I think, all in all, it becomes to bring climate change adaptation and some mitigation measures into the management of basins and all those watersheds. So these are the key main things on water resources.

On water supply, we have again, many, many challenges. We have still many Africans who get water from open sources, which most of the cases are very dirty waters. And they lose time on going to fetch water, sometimes very far from their homes.

So on sanitation, the situation is even worse. Because we still have many hundreds of millions practicing open defecation, with all the consequences on the environment, on the health of people, and livestock. We still have fecal matters which are not managed in an appropriate way. And then solid waste is still not very well managed.

GWR: Well those are major challenges for Africa's water and sanitation sectors. Let's bring in Richard Rapier to talk about the work the WALIS program has been doing in support of AMCOW, and then we'll talk a bit about their collaboration on AMCOW's 2018-2030 strategy. Before we get to that, Rich, can you first introduce yourself to our listeners, describe WALIS' overall mission, and talk about WALIS' past work with AMCOW?

Richard Rapier: My name is Richard Rapier, and I'm the Chief of Party of the USAID WALIS program. And overall, essentially what WALIS does is it is a project to strengthen the leadership ability of African institutions; this is to deliver safely managed WASH services. And the way we do that is working through improving governance processes, improving evidence-based monitoring, and peer-to-peer learning. In the past, we have worked with AMCOW at least during the WALIS program, and there's also a history of USAID working with AMCOW for a long time. But in the recent past, our primary work has been around working together at conferences, and also having members of AMCOW's technical staff weigh in and help design our improved evidence-based decision-making program, that we had to select countries through that process, and their technical staff were able to participate in that selection process.

GWR: Let's talk about AMCOW's 2018-2030 strategy that Dr. Kanangire has been discussing. Can you describe some of the ways WALIS supported the creation of that strategy? In particular, what guidance did WALIS provide with regard to AMCOW's operational effectiveness?

RR: Yeah, no problem. So WALIS had the opportunity to get involved with the strategic planning process at AMCOW. Almost immediately after, we began discussing a broader relationship with AMCOW, and a team of ours joined them in the consultative process, and we helped facilitate that process as best we could. Essentially, a lot of these consultations were not only that AMCOW did itself, but also bringing in their technical advisory committee members, members from the African Development Bank and from other stakeholders, and going through a brainstorming process to lay out, 'Well, what should be the strategic direction of AMCOW? What are the main priorities? What are the things that are cross-cutting in nature? And the area, of course, that WALIS is working with AMCOW the most is how do we improve the operational effectiveness of AMCOW, so it can grow and fulfill its mandate with the African Union and of course its members, which are all 55 member countries within Africa.

The operational effectiveness—I think if you want to say our fingerprints on the strategy around operational effectiveness—that the two areas where we felt were a high priority for such a member-based organization was, in an organization that is very much

depended on to deliver knowledge products and convening and networking its members, is communications planning and improving how the organization reaches out to its members, understands what their members want, and then the project management end of things. To take essentially an idea and a concept and working across multi-stakeholder platforms and seeing that through to fruition.

And then just to add, there is no other organization like AMCOW; it's completely unique across the entire world. There's no Latin American Ministers Council of Water, or in Asia, or anything like that. So, in Africa, I really think that we have something special in AMCOW, and it deserves as much of the support and the partnership that we can provide.

GWR: So, for both of you, how would you say the 2018-2030 strategy helps drive progress for improving the continent's water and sanitation sectors?

CK: So, with this Strategy, we will have key activities which will bring countries to focus on allocating enough money, building their capacity at the institutional level and the individual level, so that we can find solutions to that. In sanitation, we have deliberately decided to have one strategic pillar for sanitation. So that this time around, we can have the leadership of African countries giving deserved attention to the sanitation issues and putting the right resources we need to really change the way sanitation services are provided on the continent.

GWR: And looking forward, can you elaborate on some of the ways you believe AMCOW's new strategy will empower water-stressed African countries?

CK: I think this Strategy, by clearly showing the challenges you have, and showing opening a window for collection of data for what is happening in Africa, and gathering the knowledge on those, disseminating them to the appropriate levels and categories of stakeholders, I think it creates also opportunities for addressing water challenges in most stressed countries.

RR: You know, AMCOW's role, they are very much of a convener. And they can bring those countries together to find mutual solutions that will work, they provide that space, and they push out the knowledge that can help ministers share with each other, and find a solution that is able to best meet their needs, and AMCOW really provides that space, and that networking, to channel that knowledge through their members.

GWR: How might the new strategy help shape the future of AMCOW, in terms of technical capacity and financial sustainability?

CK: Here we have a chicken and egg situation. What comes first? Is it that countries who created AMCOW should put in the resources and sustain its functionality, or should AMCOW start showing results and its relevance to countries so that they can be more motivated to adapt their contributions to the need of a growing institution like AMCOW?

That is where we are, and for me as a leader of AMCOW my consideration and my emphasis is mainly to shape AMCOW and restructure the way it is today, and the functions it has to carry out, so that AMCOW can deliver the most useful pieces countries need. And once we have justified to the countries that we are useful, we are relevant, we are valuable, then we believe that countries will be generous and give higher contribution.

RR: I really agree with that. Showing the members value, what AMCOW does that supports them, that helps them to address their own problems, is the real value that AMCOW can provide. And then uniting them with other countries that have the same problems so that they can share with each other, and uniting those who are stronger in one area with those who are weaker, in a partnership.

And in terms of financial sustainability, if we see the member states as shareholders of AMCOW, as if it was a company, they will grow those shares, they will want to increase their holdings with AMCOW when they see that value. And that is, as Dr. Kanangire said, can be challenging because it is a chicken and egg, and the growth that I see in AMCOW over the next two years is going to be carefully calibrated so that the value and the financial footing for AMCOW are going to have to work hand-in-hand together.

CK: And still in line with that, at AMCOW of course we need some resources to also work to generate those deliverables, which would convince our member states of the relevance of the institution. Currently, we are more working with different donors and development partners, seeing how they can put in some resources and use those resources not only to restructure the institution, but also continue the discussion with member states on what should be the core activities, and what should be the core financing they should take as responsibility of countries or member states, so that in a number of years—let's say three or five years—AMCOW is at a very high percentage financed by member states. That is what we are developing, in what we call a sustainability plan.

To add to that, I would say that as I said earlier, heads of state mandated AMCOW to develop a monitoring system so that we can be reporting on the progress countries are making towards the highest commitment in water and sanitation Africa has taken. And we developed a system which is an online web-based system. It collects data from countries, we process them, we produce a report which is shared with the summit and other leaders. And that monitoring system, it is the first one of its kind in the region, with a continental setup. We are serving the region and individual countries, but also we are working with the global level where we share our definition of indicators and monitor I would say together the progress Africa is making toward the SDGs.

GWR: Last but not least, given that you two have been working closely together, what would you say are some of the strengths of the relationship between AMCOW and WALIS?

RR: I would just like to say that I very much like the relationship that WALIS has with AMCOW. It's a very collaborative relationship, and it's made possible by the grants that

we provide AMCOW that are accompanied by technical assistance. It's a bit of a unique approach, in that you always have an accompanying side-by-side relationship between the technical experts, but also making sure that AMCOW is there and is capacitated to carry forward all the improvements and training that is taking place.

And we know that it's just a start, that AMCOW's growth over the next 10 years, it's going to take all of that time. Because if you're going to do something really well, you're going to go a little bit slower, but you're going to do it together. And I think that is very valuable.

CK: I would like to build on what Richard has said and emphasize those aspects of partnership. We talked about challenges we have in Africa in the water and sanitation sectors; there are so many. They call for collaboration, for synergies, and we have a lot to do to bring all the African member states and our partners to the same level of understanding, and bring them to focus on the same key priorities. Otherwise, we'll continue to have duplication, and disperse the meager resources we get for this area. So we need a stronger AMCOW. To coordinate. To create synergies. To be trusted by members states, but also by our implementing partners across the continent, and also our development partners outside.

And this is where WALIS has been very important, in contributing to analyzing the situation of AMCOW currently, and also helping us to create a structure and to focus on the right functions where we need AMCOW to be strong, strong enough to be able to steer the effort of all the other organizations, and coordinate the effort of all the partners towards the SDGs, but also the African agendas.

So this partnership is very important. We wish it to be longer and bring more partners so that we can go as fast as we can. Because the challenges, there are so many. And the changes on the African continent are also very much alarming—when we talk of sanitation and look at the growth of the populations in Africa, and also the urbanization phenomenon, with the growth of slums, we need really to be very fast and very strong. And the partnership is one of the key success for this.

GWR: Well, thanks so much Dr. Kanangire and Richard Rapier for taking the time to speak with us. For more information on the African Ministers' Council on Water, the USAID-supported Water for Africa through Leadership and Institutional Support program, or other subjects discussed on this podcast, have a look at the links below. And, as always, if you have a topic you would like to see us cover in a future edition of the podcast, drop us a line at waterteam@usaid.gov.

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