



***By Atayi Babs***

As the world marks yet another Global Handwashing Day on October 15, the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) has described handwashing as a critical element in Africa's plan for the future.

In a message titled "Africa's future is in our hands," the Executive Secretary of Africa's apex water institution, Dr Canisius Kanangire urged Africa to "stand up and ensure every child has access to handwashing tools and services. According to him, handwashing remains one of the most effective measures of avoiding sicknesses and spreading germs to others.

With Diarrhea and pneumonia together accounting for almost 3.5 million child deaths annually and 42% of this estimate occurring in Africa, Dr Kanangire believes that the time to start washing our hands is now as handwashing with soap is estimated to reduce incidents of diarrhea by 30% and respiratory infections by 21% in children under the age of five.

The AMCOW Chief further reiterated his organisation's commitment to handwashing as an integral part of its water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions following the proactive step taken by African Ministers responsible for sanitation at the 4th AfricaSan Conference in Dakar, Senegal through the 4th and 6th Commitments of the N'gor Declaration.

The declaration commits African governments to ensuring strong leadership and coordination at all levels to build and sustain governance for sanitation and hygiene across sectors especially

water, health, nutrition, education, gender and the environment; and ensure inclusive, safely-managed sanitation services and functional handwashing facilities in public institutions and spaces.

Confirming his organisation's readiness to deepen its work with African member states and partners in ensuring improved livelihoods and creating the enabling environment for sanitation and hygiene across the continent, Dr Kanangire pledged to provide leadership and policy direction in the implementation, monitoring and reporting of these commitments in Africa.

### **About Global Handwashing Day**

Celebrated annually on October 15, Global Handwashing Day was founded by the Global Handwashing Partnership, and is an opportunity to design, test, and replicate creative ways to encourage people to wash their hands with soap at critical times. It is designed to foster and support a global and local culture of handwashing with soap, shine a spotlight on the state of handwashing around the world, and raise awareness about the benefits of handwashing with soap. Global Handwashing Day is endorsed by governments, international institutions, civil society organisations, NGOs, private companies and individuals around the globe

### **About AMCOW**

Established since 2002 in Abuja Nigeria, the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW) promotes cooperation, security, social and economic development and poverty eradication among member states through the effective management of the continent's water resources and provision of water supply services. The organization brings together Water and Sanitation ministers from Africa's 55-member states with the unifying purpose of providing political leadership, policy direction and advocacy in the provision, use and management of water resources for sustainable social and economic development and maintenance of African ecosystems.

AMCOW currently represents the Working Group on Water and Sanitation of the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment (ARDWE) under the African Union Commission (AUC).

