



# SCIENCE SUMMIT “**WATER DAY**” AT THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

## SPEAKER PROFILES



water & sanitation  
Department  
Water and Sanitation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



WATER  
RESEARCH  
COMMISSION



African  
Union



AIP CONTINENTAL AFRICA WATER  
INVESTMENT PROGRAMME



ISC  
Intelligence in Science

## HOST: DEPARTMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION AND THE WATER RESEARCH COMMISSION, SOUTH AFRICA



**Dr Rethabile Melamu**

*WRC Board Chairperson*

Dr Melamu is sustainability professional who is trained in Chemical and Environmental Engineering. She is currently the Chief Executive Officer of the South African Photovoltaic Industry Association (SAPVIA). She almost two decades of experience in the areas of water security, clean energy, green economy, environmental sustainability, enterprise development, life cycle assessments and climate change. My experience spans several sectors including water and sanitation, renewable energy, and waste management. I am a seasoned professional with a depth of understanding on adoption of innovative climate smart technologies in society. This is backed by experience of running a technology innovation-based incubation programme for almost 6 years. I have solid experience in developing public sector policies and have led the development of sub-national energy and green economy strategies and facilitated their implementation. I sit on several boards and advisory committees of private, academia and the public sectors organisations including as the Chair of the Water Research Commission. I am a thought leader in the energy, water and green economy sectors, having published reports, thought leadership pieces and academic articles on several platforms in my areas of expertise. I have featured extensively as a speaker on various national and international platforms. I have received recognition for my contribution in the energy sector, notably as a 2017 finalist under the Outstanding Woman in Power and Energy in Africa category at the Africa Utility Week. In 2019, I was recognised by the national Mail & Guardian newspaper as one of Women Who Are Changing South Africa in the Public Sector.



**Dr Jennifer Molwantwa**

*CEO, Water Research Commission, South Africa*

Dr Jennifer Molwantwa is the CEO of the water research commission of South Africa since 2022. She holds a PhD in Biotechnology focusing on mine water remediation and water resource management, funded by the Water Research Commission. She has over 20 years' water sector research and development and governance experience having served on various national, international Boards of Directors and university council. Jennifer served on the National Planning Commission that developed the Vision 2030 and the South African National Development Plan, as a commissioner from 2010-2015. She was a Research Manager at the WRC, and an Executive at a Catchment Management Agency in South Africa. Her passion is capacity building, skills development, and inclusion of Historically Disadvantaged Individuals (HDI) in the mainstream science and technology careers and economy of which water and land are integral. She believes: "the way for women to participate at all levels of the economy, science and technology, knowledge generation and business depends on the opportunities created by women before them".

## CO-CONVENER: AFRICAN UNION-AIP INTERNATIONAL HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON WATER INVESTMENTS FOR AFRICA (AIP HLP)



**H.E. Jakaya Kikwete**

*Alternate Co-Chair: AU AIP International High-Level Panel on Water Investment for Africa and  
Board Chair: Global Water Partnership Southern Africa-Africa Coordination (GWPSA-Africa)*

The fourth president of Tanzania, H.E. Jakaya Kikwete is a graduate of economics from the University of Dar es Salaam. He has served in many party, military, and government positions, including the Tanzanian ministerial portfolios of Finance, Water, Energy and Mineral Resources, Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. He has also served as the chairperson of the African Union in 2008–2009 and the chairman of the Southern African Development Community Troika on Peace, Defence, and Security in 2012–2013. H.E. Jakaya Kikwete has served as alternate Co-Chair of the AU's AIP International High-Level Panel on Water Investment for Africa since its launch in 2022.



**H.E. Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko**

*Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture African Union Commission*

H.E. Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko is the Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture at the African Union Commission. She was previously the special adviser to the Minister of Agriculture on issues related to international cooperation. She served as Secretary General of the Inter African Coffee Organization (IACO) for 13 years, overseeing the coffee economy of 25 African Coffee producing countries. H.E. Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko is a member of the AU's AIP International High-Level Panel on Water Investment for Africa.



**Mr Harsen Nyambe**

*Director of Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment at the African Union*

Mr Harsen Nyambe is Director of Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment at the African Union. He has 23 years of professional experience, of which 14 years of his career has been in international organisations covering the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as a Senior Programme Manager responsible for Natural Resources, the Commonwealth Secretariat as Head of Climate Change and the African Union Commission. Mr Nyambe co-leads the AIP Expert Advisory Core Group, which provides support in AIP Implementation and development of the AIP-PIDA Water Investment Scorecard.



### Ms Shaima Gargash

*Special Climate Envoy, Director of Energy & Sustainability, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, United Arab Emirates (UAE)*

Ms Shaima Gargash is the Special Climate Envoy, Director of Energy & Sustainability, Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the United Arab Emirates. Previously, Ms Gargash was the Deputy Chief of Mission at the UAE Embassy in Washington, D.C., serving since her appointment in 2019. Ms Gargash was also the Head of the Embassy's Communications and Public Diplomacy Department and a Political Analyst in the Congressional Affairs Division. Ms Gargash holds a BA in Economics and a minor in International Relations from the American University of Sharjah, and a Masters in Public Administration from the Dubai School of Government in the UAE.



### Dr Mohamed Diatta

*Sherpa to the President of Senegal, AIP High-Level Panel & Co-Host of UN 2026 Water Conference*

Dr Diatta is Coordinator of the Monitoring and Promotion Unit for the Results of the 9th World Water Forum within the Ministry of Water and Sanitation of Senegal. Dr. Diatta is also Sherpa to the President of Senegal, who is Co-Chair of the AU's AIP High-Level Panel. Dr Diatta holds a PhD in Geography and Planning, specializing in Water Policy, Governance and IWRM. He is an expert in the field of environment and water management in Senegal and West Africa.



### Mr Henk Ovink

*Executive Director, Global Commission on Economic of Water*

Mr Henk Ovink is the Executive Director and founding Commissioner for the Global Commission on the Economics of Water. Mr Ovink was the first ever global water ambassador for over 8 years, appointed in 2015 by the Dutch Cabinet as Special Envoy for International Water Affairs. In this capacity, he co-led the second UN Water Conference in 2023. Mr. Ovink sits on the AIP Steering Group, which provides strategic support and guidance to the implementation of the AIP.



### Mr Alex Simalabwi

*CEO of the AIP High-Level Panel Secretariat and Executive Secretary of GWPSA-Africa*

A graduate of Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, Mr. Alex Simalabwi has over 25 years of experience in high-level public policy engagement, advisory and advocacy on climate-resilient water investments and the integration of water into economic national development. He is the CEO of the AIP High Level panel Secretariat and Executive Secretary of GWPSA-Africa. He was consultant UNDP global support on adaptation to over 25 countries, co-chaired the World Bank Expert Group for the Pilot Program for Climate Resilience, a \$1.2 billion funding window of the \$8.1 billion Climate Investment Funds. He worked closely with the UN High-Level Panel on Water set up by 8th UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and World Bank President Dr. Jim Yong Kim comprising 11 Presidents and Heads of States from Australia, Bangladesh, Hungary, Jordan, South Africa, Mauritius, Mexico, Netherlands, Peru, Senegal & and special Adviser from South Korea.

## PROGRAMME DIRECTOR



### Dr Mamohloding Tlhagale

*Head of Partnerships and Business Development, Water Research Commission, South Africa*

Dr Tlhagale is the Head of Partnerships and Business Development at the Water Research Commission of South Africa. With 20 years of experience of managing partnerships for science, technology and innovation and holds a PhD in Management of Technology and Innovation. Dr Tlhagale has been an advocate of creating enabling environment to support the creation, uptake and transfer of the South African scientific knowledge and innovation products in and beyond the borders of SA. Dr Tlhagale serves on several international Advisory Boards and strategic committees contributing to shaping the local, African and international research, development and innovation agendas, programmes and improving international cooperation. Prior to joining the WRC, Dr Tlhagale practiced as a Medical Microbiologist and a lecturer at the Medical University of Southern Africa and Director for Strategic Partnerships at the South African Department of Science and Innovation. She is also a qualified Consciousness Coach who enjoys mentoring and empowering young professionals.



## SPEAKERS



### Dr Thomas Kariuki (Keynote Speaker)

*CEO, Science for Africa Foundation*

Dr Thomas Kariuki is Founding Director and Chief Executive Officer for the Science for Africa Foundation, established in 2021 to support, strengthen and promote science and innovation in Africa. A long-time advocate involved in the global effort to develop vaccines, drugs and diagnostics for poverty related diseases, Kariuki is a prolific science leader whose experience in science diplomacy has enabled the mobilisation of support and hundreds of millions in USD funding from global funders and African governments for science and innovation in Africa. Through his leadership, Kariuki is driving the SFA Foundation to establish global strategic partnerships and build a sustainable pan-African science funding organisation that contributes to the growth of science and innovation in Africa. He is a recipient of various national and international awards including the Presidential honour of the Order of Grand Warrior of Kenya (OGW) for scientific leadership and public service, is a fellow of the African Academy of Sciences (FAAS) and an Honorary Professor of Research of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, LSTM. He has served on many global boards and committees of Africa-wide professional networks including the Federation of African Immunological Societies (FAIS), CEPI, the World Health Organization and others.



### Ms Virginia Molose

*Acting Head Stakeholder Engagement, Water Research Commission*

Ms Molose started her career as a gender fieldworker in the land sector where she worked as a gender activist on programmes focusing on strengthening women's capacities to understand the then new land reform policies and their rights and responsibilities in that regard. This also entailed support to women on farms to lodge their land claims, negotiate for better living and working conditions and recognition as adults in law. Ms Molose continued to work in the civil society sector and broadened her experience and skills to include livelihoods and rights based approaches. She gained considerable amount of experience at training and facilitation in this work while travelling the breaths and depths of the country particularly in rural areas to support mainly civil society organisations, officials from rural municipalities and provincial and national departments in this work.

It was from the livelihoods work that Ms Molose developed interest in the water and sanitation sector and ultimately joining the sector in 2003 where she remains to date. Her contribution to this sector has been in training, skills development and capacity building in areas like health and hygiene promotion, user education and use of participatory methodologies. Ms Molose has in this sector deepened her policy research work which led her to manage various policy research projects, serve in strategic sector committees and teams. In her current portfolio as a Research Manager Virginia is responsible for the multiple use water services and empowerment of women entrepreneurs in the water and sanitation sector.



### Dr Mark Smith

*Director General of the International Water Management Institute*

Mark Smith is Director General of the International Water Management Institute. He was formerly IWMI's Deputy Director General – Research for Development, and brings more than 25 years of research and program management experience in water resources, agriculture, climate and sustainability. He was Director of the Global Water Program at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), from 2008-2018, where he led innovative, multi-regional programs in Asia, Africa and Latin America addressing river basin management, transboundary cooperation and water governance, climate change adaptation and nature-based solutions. He has a PhD in ecology and resource management from the University of Edinburgh and a Master's in climatology from the University of Guelph.



### Prof Jean-Marie Kileshye Onema

*Executive Manager and Head of the WaterNet Secretariat*

Prof Jean-Marie Kileshye Onema is the Executive Manager and Head of the WaterNet Secretariat. He oversees the implementations of Capacity development activities across the 16 SADC countries ([www.waternetonline.org](http://www.waternetonline.org)). He is currently the Secretary General of International Association of Hydrological Sciences (IAHS) ([www.iah.info](http://www.iah.info)), Wallingford, UK. Prof Kileshye Onema holds an Extraordinary full Professorship position with the Unit of Environmental Sciences and Management at the North West University, South Africa ([www.nwu.ac.za](http://www.nwu.ac.za)). Similarly, He has a Professorship appointment with the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Lubumbashi, DR Congo ([www.unilu.ac.cd](http://www.unilu.ac.cd)). Prof Kileshye Onema sits on the Board of the Princeton Climate Institute, New Jersey, (USA). Likewise, He sits on the Academic and Scientific Advisory Committee of the SASSCAL Graduate Programme at the Namibian University of Sciences and Technology (NUST). Prof Kileshye Onema holds a PhD degree in water engineering from the School of Engineering and Built Environment of the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. He went for a number of specialised trainings at the University of Nevada in Reno, USA, the University of Osnabruck in Germany and IHE Delft in the Netherlands to name a few.

He is a well published author and has led several collaborative projects on various aspects of water resources management. He was involved in Transformative Futures for Water Security, Valuing water and IAHS preparatory sessions for the UN water 2023 conference in New York.



## Prof Pascaline Dupas

*Princeton University*

Pascaline Dupas is a Professor of Economics and Public Affairs at Princeton University and Co-Scientific Director of J-PAL Africa. Pascaline joined the Princeton faculty in July 2023. She was previously the Kleinheinz Family Professor of International Studies at Stanford University, where she spent 12 years on the faculty. She has also held faculty positions at Dartmouth College and UCLA. Her ongoing research includes studies of education policy in Ghana, family planning policy in Burkina Faso, and government subsidized health insurance in India, among others. She is the co-President of the Bureau for Research and Economic Analysis of Development (BREAD) and a Research Associate at the National Bureau for Economic Research (NBER).

In 2013 she received a National Science Foundation CAREER award, awarded by the US government to recognize and honor outstanding scientists and engineers at the outset of their independent research careers. In 2015 she received the Best Young French Economist Prize, awarded to the French economist under 40 whose work is most influential. She is a Fellow of the Econometric Society, a former Sloan Fellow, and a former Guggenheim Fellow. Pascaline studied philosophy and economics as an undergraduate student at the École Normale Supérieure (Ulm). She obtained a PhD in Economics from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in 2006. In addition to her role as co-Scientific Director of J-PAL Africa, Pascaline has served as Co-Chair of J-PAL's Health sector, a member of the Executive Committee of J-PAL's Board of Directors, and as a mentor to J-PAL regional scholars. She has also lectured at J-PAL training events.



## Mr Dominic O'Neill

*Executive Director of the UN's Sanitation and Hygiene Fund (SHF)*

Dominic O'Neill is the Executive Director of the UN's Sanitation and Hygiene Fund (SHF) since its inception in 2021. Dominic has a long-standing career spanning over three decades in international development and environmental health. In his early career, he worked for the Ministry of Health in Namibia as an Environmental Health Adviser. He then worked for the UK Government as a senior civil servant in the Department for International Development serving as Country Director in Yemen, Sierra Leone, Nepal and as Head of UN funding in DFID. On leaving the UK Government, Dominic became the Global COO for WWF International.

Dominic served as an Executive Director on the Board of the African Development Bank representing the Governments of the Netherlands, the UK and Italy from 2013 to 2016, under Dr Kaberuka and then Dr Adesina. Dominic graduated in Environmental Health and later completed an MSc in Water. Deeply committed to inclusivity and gender equality, Dominic became a member of the International Gender Champion Network in 2024.





**Mr Michael John Webster**

*Program Manager of the 2030 Water Resources Group*

Mike is the Program Manager of the 2030 Water Resources Group. 2030 WRG is a multi-donor trust fund, managed by the World Bank's Global Water Practice. The fund advances global water security through public private collaboration. We empower partners to tackle water risks that affect food, cities and ecosystems by providing strategy insights, facilitating partnerships and security financing for scalable solutions.

From 2018 to 2023, Mike ran the Water and Sanitation Utility of the City of Cape Town. He led the City's response to the 'day zero' drought by implementing a strategy to achieve water security. Under Mike's leadership, the Directorate was the first utility in Africa to join the Leading Utilities of the World. Prior to 2018, Mike worked for the World Bank for 16 years. He joined through the Young Professionals Program and worked as a water and sanitation specialist in Washington DC, New Delhi and Harare.