
**JOINT STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (NHRC) AND
ACTIONAID INTERNATIONAL THE GAMBIA (AAITG) ON THE COMMEMORATION OF THE
DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD – 2026**

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and ActionAid International The Gambia (AAITG) join the rest of Africa in commemorating the Day of the African Child, observed annually on 16 June, in honour of the children who lost their lives during the 1976 Soweto uprising in South Africa. This Day also serves as a reminder everyone, especially duty bearers, of the importance of protecting, promoting and fulfilling the rights of every child.

The theme of the 2026 commemoration centres on universal access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) for every child in Africa. It highlights the central role of water, sanitation and hygiene in the realisation of children’s rights, including their rights to survival, education, health and development. The theme further underscores that access to safe water and adequate sanitation is not only a development priority but a fundamental human right obligation that States must fulfil for all children.

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child has consistently emphasised the principle of inclusiveness as central to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. This requires that no child, including children in rural communities, children living in poverty and children with disabilities, is left behind by the State in fulfilling its obligations towards children. It also entails, in practice, the guaranteeing of inclusive access to essential services to ensure equality and dignity for all children. In The Gambia, the promotion and protection of children’s rights is grounded in the 1997 Constitution and the Children’s Act 2005, which guarantee the rights of children to protection, development and access to basic social services while mandating the State and its institutions to ensure the realisation of these rights.

According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2018 Report, access to drinking water has improved nationwide, with approximately 90 per cent and 61 per cent of households having access to improved drinking water sources and improved sanitation facilities, respectively. However, it also noted significant gaps in sanitation, hygiene and water quality, with only 31 per cent of households having access to handwashing facilities where soap and water are present and 73 per cent of households whose water was tested had E. coli faecal contamination, indicating serious concerns regarding water safety and hygiene practices.

Furthermore, environmental degradation, along with recurring flooding and drought conditions, continues to expose children to water-borne diseases and other health risks, particularly in vulnerable communities. Access to adequate water, sanitation and hygiene services in schools, health care facilities and public spaces also remains uneven. While a high proportion of primary

schools meet national standards for WASH facilities, disparities persist between urban and rural areas. Gaps in infrastructure, including the limited availability of gender responsive sanitation facilities, continue to affect children's dignity, safety and full participation in education.

The NHRC and AAITG are also concerned that children's participation in decision-making processes as regards WASH matters remains limited, reducing the extent to which their lived experiences inform policies and programmes. The African Children's Charter guarantees the right of children to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and to have those views given due consideration. As rights holders and critical stakeholders, children's active participation in these processes should be strengthened through structured and inclusive engagement mechanisms at national, regional, community and school levels, including through the work of the NHRC's Child Rights Monitoring Unit, which supports the integration of children's voices into its advocacy and engagement with duty bearers, and AAITG's Child Sponsorship Programme, which promotes children empowerment interventions..

In light of these challenges, the NHRC and AAITG call on government institutions, local authorities, development partners, NGO/CSO, communities and schools to strengthen efforts towards ensuring universal access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene for all children. The NHRC and AAITG also call on the Government to prioritise inclusive planning that considers the specific needs of children in rural areas and children with disabilities. We further recommend the following to the Government:

1. Enhance investment in water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure throughout the country, particularly in rural and underserved communities and schools.
2. Improve water quality monitoring and promote safe hygiene practices at the school, household and community levels.
3. Ensure schools and public institutions are equipped with adequate, safe, accessible and gender responsive water and sanitation facilities and which are also protective of privacy and dignity, including menstrual hygiene management.
4. Promote inclusive service delivery that addresses the needs of all children, in particular children with disabilities.
5. Promote meaningful participation of children in the design, monitoring and evaluation of WASH laws, policies and programmes affecting them. Strengthen coordination among stakeholders to ensure effective implementation of WASH initiatives and projects that guarantee that rights of children.
6. Allocate adequate and dedicated budget lines for child-focused WASH interventions in schools and early childhood centres.

7. Ensure access to child-friendly information on water quality, hygiene practices, available services and environmental protection.
8. Guarantee continuous availability of safe water in schools, health facilities and childcare institutions.

As we commemorate the Day of the African Child 2026, the NHRC and AAITG reaffirm their commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of all children in The Gambia. It also calls upon all relevant stakeholders to ensure that children's voices are heard and given due regard in decision-making that affects them and that their rights are respected, protected and fulfilled without discrimination.



Mr. Emmanuel Daniel Joof
Chairperson, NHRC



Mrs. Ndella Faye Colley
Executive Director, AAITG