LESSONS BRIEF

ESWATINI WATER INVESTMENT PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY



The Eswatini Water Investment Programme (EWIP) 2025–2050, developed under the AU-AIP Multi-Country Green Climate Fund Readiness initiative, serves as a transformative framework to secure a climate-resilient water future for Eswatini. This brief captures key lessons learned from the programme's development, drawing on stakeholder engagements, technical analyses, and institutional assessments. The lessons highlight critical success factors and challenges that can inform future water sector investments and broader development planning in Eswatini.

Eswatini faces significant water security challenges driven by climate variability, increasing demand, and systemic institutional and financing constraints. The country withdraws approximately 78% of its renewable freshwater resources, placing it under high water stress, while climate change is projected to reduce river flows by up to 40% by 2050. At the same time, governance fragmentation, limited data systems, and a priority investment gap estimated at USD 1.38 billion have constrained effective water development. These challenges necessitated the development of EWIP as an integrated, climate-resilient investment framework.

PROGRAMME INTERVENTION

Key interventions include strengthening governance through the National AIP Task Force, enhancing data systems, promoting blended finance, and aligning water investments with national development priorities such as the National Development Plan (2023-2028) and Vision 2022-2030.

KINGDOM OF ESWATINI
MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY

KEY POLICY MESSAGES

1. **Water Security Must Be Positioned as an Economic Development Imperative:** The EWIP development process demonstrated that water should no longer be viewed solely as a social service or WASH issue, but as a strategic economic asset underpinning agriculture, energy generation, industrialization, public health, and climate resilience. Integrating water into national economic planning strengthens the investment case and attracts broader political and financial support.

2. **Integrated Planning is Essential for Addressing Complex Water Challenges:** The absence of a consolidated national water investment framework revealed the limitations of fragmented sector planning. Bringing together water, agriculture, energy, environment, finance, and social sectors under a common investment framework enabled a more coherent and coordinated approach to water security.

3. **Climate Resilience Must Be Embedded in Water Investment Planning from the Outset:** The EWIP process confirmed that climate adaptation considerations are most effective when incorporated during programme design rather than added later. Early involvement of climate finance institutions and the National Designated Authority strengthened the programme's bankability and alignment with climate finance requirements.

4. **Stakeholder Ownership Enhances Programme Legitimacy and Sustainability:** Inclusive engagement across government ministries, development partners, civil society, and technical experts improved programme quality, strengthened ownership, and increased confidence in future implementation arrangements.

5. **Alignment with National and Global Development Agendas Strengthens Political Support:** The strong alignment of the EWIP with Eswatini's National Development Plan, Vision 2022–2030, NDCs, SDGs, and Agenda 2063 enhanced its relevance and positioned the programme as a vehicle for delivering multiple national development priorities simultaneously.

6. **Evidence-Based Decision Making Requires Strong Data and Knowledge Systems:** The EWIP development process exposed significant gaps in water-related data and highlighted the importance of investing in monitoring systems, knowledge management, and institutional memory to support adaptive management and informed decision-making.

POLITICAL WILL AS A DRIVER FOR CLIMATE-RESILIENT WATER SECURITY IN ESWATINI

The development of the EWIP has been characterized by an unprecedented level of political will, transitioning the programme from a technical draft into a central pillar of the national development agenda. Political mobilization for the EWIP is anchored by the sovereign vision of His Majesty King Mswati III. His Majesty has transitioned from a domestic champion to an international advocate, utilizing platforms such as the AU Water Investment Summit to position Eswatini's water security within the broader Vision 2022-2030. This sovereign commitment ensures that water infrastructure is not a departmental footnote but a prerequisite for national prosperity.

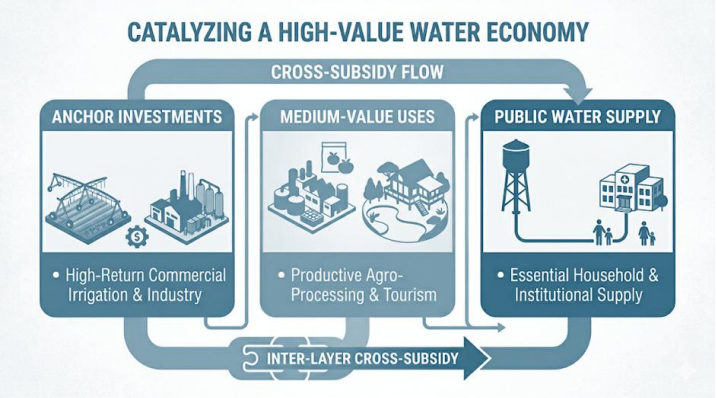
To operationalize this vision, the government has institutionalized inter-ministerial coordination involving nine-line ministries, effectively dissolving traditional sectoral silos.

The Multi-Sectoral Technical Working Group (TWG): Commitment Beyond Funding

The technical foundation of the EWIP was forged by a Technical Working Group (TWG) during a rigorous 22-month development cycle. Crucially, this technical development was maintained outside of formal project funding cycles, serving as a primary indicator of sustained political will and institutional dedication.

The TWG developed a 3-Layer Value Chain Model, which provides the fiscal logic for the entire programme:

- Layer 1 -Anchor Investments: High-revenue multipurpose dams generate early cash flows from energy and export agriculture.
- Layer 2 -Medium-Value Intermediaries: Special Economic Zones and industrial clusters pay cost-reflective tariffs.
- Layer 3 -Public Water Supply: Universal social access for rural households is made financially viable through cross-subsidization from Layer 1 and 2 revenues, removing the need for perpetual treasury subsidies.

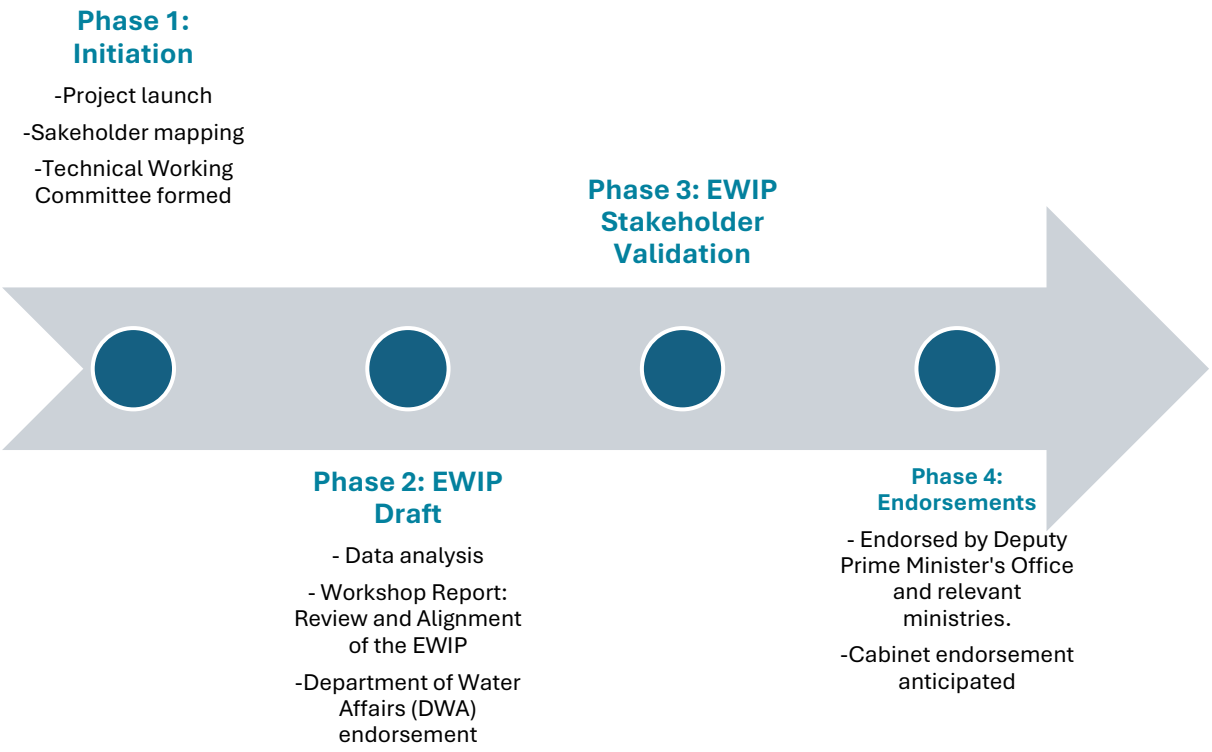


The Role of the Deputy Prime Minister's Office (DPMO)

Under the EWIP, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) is not a voluntary aspiration, but a reportable Key Performance Indicator monitored by the AIP-PIDA Water Investment Scorecard. The DPMO has mandated a minimum 40% women's representation in all governance bodies, from the National AIP Task Force to local Water User Associations. Key governance metrics include:

- Social Targeting: Integration of the National Dynamic Social Registry (Imbeleko) to ensure infrastructure reaches the most vulnerable households.
- Disability-Inclusive WASH: Mandating universal design standards for all new water points to remove barriers for the elderly and people with disabilities.
- Economic Empowerment: Allocating SZL 18.1 billion (13% of total investment) specifically to gender-responsive interventions, targeting the reduction of women's water collection time from 3.2 hours to 0.5 hours by 2035.

CHRONOLOGY OF EWIP DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY



Key Challenge Identified: Eswatini does not have a consolidated national water investment framework. Multiple master plans (Water, WASH, Irrigation) have overlapping and conflicting priorities.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

1. Multi-Stakeholder Technical Working Groups Accelerate Complex Financial Modelling: Establishing a dedicated Technical Working Committee with embedded GWP specialists (Finance, Climate, Investment Programming) significantly accelerated the development of bankable financial models.

2. Early and Continuous Engagement with the National Designated Authority (NDA) Secures Climate Finance Pathway: Embedding the NDA (MTEA) in the Technical Working Committee from the outset ensured that climate rationale, GCF readiness criteria, and adaptation benefit quantification were integrated into the EWIP design, not retrofitted. Many climate finance proposals fail because they are designed as "water projects" with climate adaptation as an afterthought. By having the NDA at the table during reservoir costing and transmission modelling, the EWIP's climate rationale was built into the financial architecture from the outset of technical design.

3. Ensuring Sustainability through Institutional Memory: The EWIP process highlighted the importance of building and maintaining institutional memory across government entities. Given the long-term nature of water investments (2025–2050), continuity in knowledge management, documentation, and capacity development is essential. Embedding Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) systems and strengthening data platforms ensures that institutional knowledge is preserved and informs adaptive management.

4. Stakeholder Partnerships Strengthen Ownership and Legitimacy: The programme demonstrated that inclusive stakeholder engagement, across ministries, development partners, and communities, provides a neutral platform for dialogue and consensus-building. This was particularly critical in addressing governance fragmentation and competing water demands across sectors such as agriculture, industry, and domestic use. Active participation enhanced ownership of the EWIP and increased the likelihood of successful implementation.

5. Alignment with National Development Frameworks Enhances Success: The EWIP's strong alignment with national and international frameworks, including the National Development Plan, NDCs, and SDG 6, was instrumental in strengthening its relevance and political support. Positioning water as an enabler of economic growth, energy security, and climate resilience ensured that the programme is not treated as a standalone sector initiative but as a central pillar of national development.

6. Early Clarification of Roles and Responsibilities Builds Trust: The water investment programme process revealed that clearly defining institutional roles and responsibilities is essential for effective implementation. However, this process requires time due to overlapping mandates and existing institutional structures. The establishment of coordinated governance mechanisms, such as the National AIP Task Force, helps address fragmentation while allowing flexibility for role clarification.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Institutionalize Integrated Water Investment Planning:** The Government of Eswatini should establish permanent mechanisms for cross-sectoral coordination and planning to ensure water investments are aligned with national priorities in agriculture, energy, industry, health, and climate resilience.
2. **Strengthen the National AIP Task Force and Coordination Structures**: The National AIP Team should be formally empowered and adequately resourced to coordinate implementation, mobilize investment, monitor progress, and facilitate collaboration across institutions.
3. **Prioritize Investment in Water Information and Decision-Support Systems:** Eswatini should invest in modern hydrological monitoring, groundwater assessment, digital water information systems, and knowledge management platforms to support evidence-based planning and climate-resilient decision-making.
4. **Develop a Sustainable Water Financing Architecture:** Government and partners should operationalize blended finance mechanisms, climate finance pathways, and innovative financing instruments that leverage public funding to attract private sector and development finance investments.
5. **Embed Climate Adaptation and Risk Management Across All Water Investments:** Future water infrastructure and service delivery investments should systematically incorporate climate risk assessments, resilience measures, and nature-based solutions to address increasing climate variability and extreme weather events.
6. **Strengthen Institutional Capacity and Knowledge Retention:** Long-term capacity development programmes should be implemented across key water sector institutions to reduce reliance on external expertise and preserve institutional memory throughout programme implementation.
7. **Position Water as a Catalyst for Economic Transformation:** Future policy and investment decisions should recognize water infrastructure as foundational economic infrastructure that enables agricultural productivity, industrial growth, energy security, job creation, and climate resilience.

CONCLUSION

The lessons learnt from the development process of the EWIP, highlight the importance of institutional strengthening, stakeholder engagement, strategic alignment, and integrated planning in achieving climate-resilient water security. These insights provide valuable guidance for future programmes and investments in Eswatini and beyond. Applying these lessons will enhance the effectiveness, sustainability, and scalability of water sector interventions, ensuring long-term socio-economic and environmental benefits.