POLICY BRIEF

ESWATINI WATER INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

A Medium-to Long-Term Strategic Framework for Climate-Resilient Water Security, 2025–2050



PUBLICATION : JUNE 2026

DOCUMENT REFERENCE : EWIP/GWP-SA/PB/2026/01

PROGRAMME PERIOD: 2025–2050 (25 YEARS)

TOTAL INVESTMENT: SZL 139 BILLION (USD 7.62 BILLION)

Eswatini's Water Investment Programme (EWIP) 2025–2050 is a strategic, medium-long - term roadmap to secure a "Climate-Resilient Water Future for All emaSwati" by unlocking an additional SZL 139.0 billion (USD 7.62 billion) in total investment by 2050. The programme elevates water security from a technical issue to a primary strategic challenge for the nation's economic growth and poverty reduction.

KINGDOM OF ESWATINI

MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Approve the EWIP as National Water Investment Policy:** Cabinet approval of the EWIP by December 2026 is the single most consequential near-term decision for Eswatini's water security, economic growth, and climate resilience. The programme is technically complete, investment-ready, and supported by nine-line ministries. Delayed approval forfeits a time-limited window for continental endorsement under the AU-AIP framework and risks losing SZL 27.8 billion in climate finance commitments already in the pipeline.

2. **Establish the Water Investment Fund as a Statutory Corporation:** The Water Investment Fund (WIF) is the financial backbone of the EWIP. Its establishment through legislation will enable the three-layer cross-subsidisation model where industrial and commercial water users finance expanded access for rural and low-income households. Cabinet must authorise tabling of the WIF Act in Parliament alongside the EWIP resolution.

3. **Authorise the Eswatini Century Water Bond:** The Eswatini Century Water Bond (ECWB), a 30-100-year infrastructure bond at 7.05% yield, reduces Eswatini's water infrastructure financing cost by 48.7% compared to commercial alternatives. Authorising its issuance unlocks SZL 69.5 billion (50% of total programme investment) from capital markets. The sovereign guarantee required is capped at SZL 34.75 billion, representing just 0.18% of GDP, a fiscally prudent commitment.

4. **Mainstream EWIP Targets Across All Sectoral Ministry Budgets:** Water security is a cross-cutting issue. Agricultural production, industrial development, public health, gender equality, and environmental sustainability are all contingent on reliable water access. All nine affected ministries should reflect EWIP targets and timelines in their Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) submissions, beginning with the 2027/28 budget cycle.

5. **Formally Engage Traditional Authorities as EWIP Partners:** Approximately 76% of Eswatini's land area is Swazi Nation Land administered through 55 Tinkhundla Councils. No EWIP infrastructure investment on SNL can proceed without traditional authority consent. Government should issue formal engagement letters to all relevant chiefs and Tinkhundla Councils in parallel with Cabinet processing, to avoid delays in site approvals once the programme is authorised.

6. **Activate the Climate Finance Pipeline Immediately After Cabinet Approval:** The SZL 27.8 billion climate finance pipeline, comprising GCF, Adaptation Fund, AfDB Climate Fund, and GEF allocations, is structured and ready for activation, subject to Cabinet approval. MTEA as the National Designated Authority should be positioned to submit the full GCF proposal within 60 days of the Cabinet Resolution, targeting first climate finance disbursement by Q3 2027.



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Eswatini faces an escalating water security crisis driven by structural underinvestment, fragmented governance, and accelerating climate change. Public expenditure on water and sanitation stands at 0.4% of GDP, well below the regionally endorsed target of 1.5%, while climate projections indicate a 40% reduction in surface water availability in key catchments by 2050. These pressures coincide with a rapidly growing economy and population whose demand for water for agriculture, industry, and domestic use is outpacing available supply.

The EWIP 2025-2050 was developed to close this gap through a nationally owned, investment-ready, and climate-resilient response. It was developed over a 22 month period (August 2024 – June 2026), under the African Union–Africa Investment Programme (AU-AIP) Multi-Country GCF Readiness Support Initiative, with funding from the Green Climate Fund (GCF Readiness Programme), technical implementation by GWP Southern Africa, and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy as the lead national institution.

THE CRISIS ESWATINI FACES

- Only 69% of rural communities have access to clean water
- 58% national sanitation coverage — among the lowest in SADC
- Non-revenue water exceeds 40% in urban distribution systems
- Zero GCF concept notes approved since 2020
- Annual investment gap of SZL 5.75 billion per year
- 40% projected streamflow decline in key catchments by 2050

WHAT THE EWIP DELIVERS BY 2035

- 100% rural and urban water access (basic services)
- Sanitation coverage increased to 85%
- Non-revenue water reduced to 15% by 2035
- SZL 27.8 billion climate finance pipeline activated
- 50,500 ha of new irrigated agricultural land
- Women's daily water collection time cut from 3.2 hrs to 0.5 hrs

WHAT IS THE EWIP?

The EWIP is Eswatini's first consolidated, investment-ready national water security framework. With a **25-year planning horizon from 2025 to 2050**, it constitutes a **medium- to long-term strategic framework**-transcending the shorter cycles of annual budgets and five-year medium-term plans. Planning horizons extending to ten years and beyond are characterised as long-term in international planning practice. The EWIP deliberately operates across both the medium term (2025-2032, Phase 1 and 2), where institutional reforms, governance architecture, and initial infrastructure are sequenced for rapid impact, and the long term (2032–2050, Phases 3 and 4), where full infrastructure deployment, economic transformation, and ecosystem consolidation are achieved.

The programme is structured around five strategic investment pillars, an enabling cross-cutting GESI layer, and a blended financing architecture designed to leverage public, climate, and private capital at scale. It is not a sectoral water plan — it is a national economic and climate resilience programme anchored in the water sector.



PROGRAMME PHASES

PHASE	PERIOD	KEY FOCUS	BUDGET (USD)
Phase 1	2025–2026	Governance foundations, institutional reform, National AIP Task Force, Water Investment Fund establishment, potable access scale-up	**USD 11.2 Million**
Phase 2	2026–2027	Governance reform consolidation, supply expansion under the WEFE Nexus, climate finance mobilisation	**USD 23.6 Million**
Phase 3	2027–2032	Major infrastructure, storage and dam construction, economic water utilisation, catchment management integrated with civil works	**USD 1,210.6 Million**
Phase 4	2032–2050	Circular economy transition, ecosystem services consolidation, scale-up of nature-based solutions, additional finance rounds	**USD 134.7 Million**
TOTAL	2025–2050	Full programme lifecycle — universal water security for all emaSwati	**USD 1.38 Billion**

SZL 139Bn Total Investment (USD 7.62Bn)	**3.25:1** Benefit-Cost Ratio	**14.2%** Internal Rate of Return	**25,000** Direct & Indirect Jobs	**+SZL 125Bn** Net Present Value @ 6%



FINANCING ARCHITECTURE

The EWIP deploys a blended financing architecture that systematically combines five distinct capital sources, each calibrated to its risk profile and investment horizon. This model reduces dependence on any single funder and builds long-term fiscal sustainability through the Water Investment Fund's cross-subsidisation mechanism.

SOURCE	AMOUNT (SZL)	SHARE	TERMS
Eswatini Century Water Bond (ECWB) -30-100-year bond at 7.05% yield	**69.5 billion**	**50%**	Long-tenor sovereign instrument; 48.7% cheaper than commercial alternatives
Climate Finance -GCF, Adaptation Fund, GEF	**27.8 billion**	**20%**	Grants and concessional loans; pipeline structured and ready for submission
Development Banks-AfDB, World Bank	**20.9 billion**	**15%**	25–30 year loans at 2–4%; supported by existing country programming frameworks
Government Equity-MTEF allocations over 20 years	**13.9 billion**	**10%**	Scaled budget contributions; aligns with NDP water sector targets
Private Sector- PPP equity and commercial debt	**6.95 billion**	**5%**	Industrial water parks, irrigation schemes, wastewater treatment PPPs

Climate Finance Pipeline: The SZL 27.8 billion climate finance component comprises a GCF Water Security proposal (SZL 6.3Bn), Adaptation Fund Early Warning Systems concept (SZL 2.1Bn), GEF Ecosystem Restoration programme (SZL 1.5Bn), and AfDB Climate Fund Irrigation facility (SZL 5.8Bn). All are structured under the GCF Readiness framework administered by MTEA as Eswatini's National Designated Authority.

INDIGENOUS AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN EWIP: BUILDING RESILIENCE FROM WITHIN

One of the EWIP's distinguishing features is its explicit integration of Eswatini's indigenous and traditional knowledge (IKS) systems into the programme's investment logic, governance architecture, and climate resilience strategy. This integration reflects an evidence-based recognition that community-level water resilience in Eswatini has historically been sustained by traditional governance systems, community-managed landscapes, and place-based ecological knowledge that formal engineering approaches alone cannot replicate or replace.

Traditional Governance as a Formal EWIP Implementation Layer

Approximately 76% of Eswatini's land area is Swazi Nation Land (SNL), administered through 55 Tinkhundla Councils and their imiphakatsi (chiefdoms). The EWIP recognises traditional leaders not as passive community liaisons, but as formal co-implementors with legally defined roles as detailed in the table below:

IKS/TRADITIONAL ROLE	HOW IT IS FORMALLY EMBEDDED IN THE EWIP
Land Custodianship & Site Approval	No EWIP infrastructure investment on Swazi Nation Land may proceed without the co-signature of the relevant chief and Tinkhundla Council. Infrastructure Development Reservations (IDRs) formalise this consent, protecting EWIP sites from encroachment and ensuring community buy-in before construction begins.
Catchment Stewardship Rewards Programme	The EWIP channels direct WIF payments to chiefdoms demonstrating certified conservation outcomes: wetland protection, alien vegetation clearing, soil conservation, and riverbank restoration. This monetises and institutionalises traditional land stewardship practices that have maintained catchment health for generations.
Community Liaison & Social Licence	Traditional leaders convene Community Liaison Committees (CLCs) for all EWIP projects on SNL. Host Community Benefit Agreements specify community entitlements, traditional authority accountability, and oversight responsibilities — ensuring benefits flow to communities, not just infrastructure budgets.
Water Allocation & Dispute Resolution	Traditional leaders confirm Water User Association (WUA) membership and serve as first-instance mediators in water allocation disputes, before cases escalate to the National Water Authority. This preserves customary dispute resolution mechanisms that communities already trust and understand.
Ecological Knowledge in Catchment Planning	Community-held knowledge of seasonal water patterns, drought indicators, spring locations, and traditional water harvesting sites informs the EWIP's catchment baseline assessments and nature-based solution siting- particularly for the 5,000-ha wetland restoration target and the 15-community dam programme.

> **National IKS Reference:** Eswatini's Outreach Programme on Strengthening Adaptation and Traditional Knowledge Systems to Enhance Resilience — implemented through the NAP Global Network and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) — provides the national IKS knowledge base that the EWIP's community engagement and catchment stewardship frameworks draw on. See: napglobalnetwork.org/project/eswatini-outreach-programme-strengthening-adaptation-and-traditional-knowledge-systems-to-enhance-resilience.

GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI)

The EWIP allocates a minimum of 13% of total programme investment — SZL 18.1 billion — to gender-responsive and socially inclusive interventions. GESI is not a parallel programme; it is embedded structurally in every investment pillar, with mandatory minimum targets and reportable KPIs.

GESI COMMITMENT	DETAIL
Women's time poverty	Target: Women's daily water collection time reduced from 3.2 hours to 0.5 hours by 2035 — equivalent to over 1,000 hours per woman per year redirected to economic activity, education, and family wellbeing
Infrastructure siting	All rural water infrastructure is located within 500 metres of homesteads, with design specifications verified by women's representatives in Community Liaison Committees

GESI COMMITMENT	DETAIL
Employment targets	Minimum 30% women and 25% youth employment in all EWIP construction and operation contracts, enforced through WIF performance agreements
Irrigation allocation	EWADE targets 40% female and youth (under 35) plot allocation in all new irrigation schemes, directly addressing the historical exclusion of women from productive water use
Governance representation	A minimum 40% women's representation target in all EWIP governance bodies — National AIP Task Force, WIF Board, Water User Associations, and Community Liaison Committees — is a reportable KPI, not a voluntary aspiration

CONTINENTAL AND REGIONAL ALIGNMENT

The EWIP is positioned within — and actively contributes to — multiple continental and regional frameworks. This alignment is not decorative: it enables access to continental technical assistance, expanded investor networks, and climate finance mechanisms that are only available to programmes meeting international investment-readiness standards.

FRAMEWORK	EWIP ALIGNMENT	BENEFIT TO ESWATINI
AU-AIP / PIDA-PAP 2	Eswatini among the inaugural 15-nation GCF Readiness cohort; EWIP submitted for formal AU continental endorsement (March 2027)	AU Project Preparation Facility access; continental investor mobilisation; peer-learning with 37 other AIP countries
AU Theme 2026: "Assuring Sustainable Water Availability and Safe Sanitation Systems"	EWIP Cabinet approval and AU submission are sequenced directly within the AU's highest-priority institutional theme for 2026	Maximum political visibility at AU heads of state level; enhanced probability of endorsement and investment commitment
Green Climate Fund (GCF)	Developed under the AU-AIP GCF Multi-Country Readiness Support Initiative; MTEA as NDA; SZL 6.3Bn full GCF proposal ready for post-Cabinet submission	Access to GCF full proposal window; adaptation and mitigation co-benefits quantified to GCF standards
SADC RISDP 2020–2030	EWIP's irrigation expansion, transboundary dam notifications (Komati/Usuthu), and urban WASH targets align directly with SADC water sector commitments	SADC endorsement strengthens AU-AIP submission; KOBWA and Usuthu River Commission support secured
Eswatini's NDC and National Adaptation Plan	EWIP operationalises Eswatini's NDC water sector targets and NAP adaptation priorities, including the 40% streamflow decline mitigation programme	Climate finance eligibility confirmed; alignment with GCF adaptation criteria demonstrated

IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAY: FROM CABINET APPROVAL TO AU ENDORSEMENT

NOW	DEC 2026	JAN 2027	FEB 2027	MAR 2027
MNRE Formal Endorsement	**Cabinet Approval**	**National Launch**	**SADC Submission**	**AU-AIP Endorsement**
MNRE endorsement letter; inter-ministerial consultation launched	All 9 ministerial endorsements; joint MNRE–MTEA Cabinet Memo; Cabinet Resolution	His Majesty's National Launch; investor roadshow; ECWB issuance begins	SADC Water Division; KOBWA and Usuthu Commission notifications; SADC endorsement	AU Commission submission; Investment Forum presentation; climate finance activated

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Eswatini Water Investment Programme was developed under the **African Union–Africa Investment Programme (AU-AIP) Multi-Country GCF Readiness Support Initiative**, which supported Eswatini as one of the inaugural 15 nations selected under this continental programme. The EWIP Secretariat gratefully acknowledges the following institutions for their technical, financial, and institutional support in the development of this programme:

INSTITUTION	CONTRIBUTION
Green Climate Fund (GCF)	Provided the GCF Readiness and Preparatory Support grant (USD 300,000) that financed the EWIP development process under the Multi-Country Readiness Initiative.
African Union Commission (AUC) / AUDA-NEPAD	Provided the continental framework, technical standards, and AU-AIP investment scorecard methodology within which the EWIP was designed and benchmarked.
GWP Southern Africa (GWP-SA)	Served as the implementing entity for the AU-AIP GCF Readiness project; provided embedded specialist teams in climate finance, investment programming, and water governance; and served as the EWIP Secretariat.
Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs (MTEA)	Served as Eswatini's National Designated Authority (NDA) to the GCF; signed and administered the GCF Readiness grant agreement; provided climate finance leadership throughout.
Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy (MNRE) / Department of Water Affairs	Served as the lead national technical institution; provided DWA specialist staff, hydrological data, and engineering validation throughout the EWIP development process.
Austrian Development Agency and Sida	Co-funders of the AU-AIP framework capacity building programme that supported Eswatini's participation in the regional readiness initiative.
National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA), Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Ministry of Finance, Eswatini Water Services Corporation (EWSC), and Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise (EWADE)	Key national technical partners contributing sector expertise, institutional data, and validation throughout the 22-month development process.
Civil Society Organisations, Private Sector, and Traditional Authorities	Over 150 national stakeholders participated in validation workshops, consultations, and technical reviews across four regional locations, contributing essential local knowledge and ensuring the EWIP reflects the realities of communities across Eswatini.

Citation: This Policy Brief should be cited as: GWP Southern Africa (2026). Eswatini Water Investment Programme 2025–2050: Policy Brief. Prepared under the AU-AIP GCF Multi-Country Readiness Support Initiative. Mbabane, Eswatini: Department of Water Affairs, Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy. June 2026.

CONTACT INFORMATION

EWIP SECRETARIAT

Department of Water Affairs
Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy
Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini
Lilunga House, Somhlolo Road
Mbabane, H100, Kingdom of Eswatini
Email : dwa@gov.sz
Website: www.gov.sz/water

GWP SOUTHERN AFRICA

Implementing Entity — AU-AIP GCF Readiness
Global Water Partnership Southern Africa
Pretoria, South Africa
Email : info@gwpsaf.org
Website: www.gwpsaf.org
AU-AIP Programme: Home - Africa Water Investment Program
GCF Readiness: www.greenclimate.fund/readiness