MINISTRY OF WATER
SANITATION AND IRRIGATION
REPUBLIC OF KENYA

UNOPS

Press release – For immediate release

Kenya and UNOPS Partner to Strengthen Irrigation Investment and Boost National Food Security

The partnership will contribute to the modernisation of irrigation infrastructure, increase agricultural productivity and drive socio-economic development across the country.



Ephantus Kimotho, Principal Secretary, State Department for Irrigation of Kenya and Massimo Diana, Director for UNOPS East and Southern Africa Multi-Country Office, during the signing of an MoU, 23rd November 2026. ©UNOPS/ Anne Okumu

Nairobi, 24 November 2026 - The State Department for Irrigation under Kenya's Ministry of Water, Sanitation and Irrigation and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen irrigation development and investment across Kenya, supporting national efforts to

improve food security, create jobs and build climate resilience, creating sustainable livelihoods across the country.

Under this partnership, the State Department for Irrigation and UNOPS will work together to address challenges affecting the performance of irrigation infrastructure, with particular attention to governance, asset management, infrastructure rehabilitation and technology upgrades.

The agreement comes as Kenya intensifies efforts to strengthen national food security by increasing agricultural productivity, reducing vulnerability to climate shocks and expanding opportunities for economic growth through modern irrigation infrastructure. Currently, only about 21 per cent of Kenya's estimated irrigation potential has been developed, highlighting the need to both improve existing schemes and expand new irrigation opportunities.



Representatives of the State Department for Irrigation and UNOPS, at the signing of the MoU.©UNOPS/ Anne Okumu

Speaking during the signing of the MoU, Ephantus Kimotho, Principal Secretary, State Department for Irrigation, said the partnership would support Kenya's ambition to expand irrigation, strengthen food security and unlock new investment into the agricultural sector.

“The technical expertise of the State Department, combined with that of UNOPS and other partners, will support fast-track implementation. Currently, we are importing

over KES 4 billion ($ 30.7 million) worth of food. Yet we have land, and we have water in Kenya. With proper water management, improved water security and the right irrigation infrastructure, we should be able to significantly reduce that dependency," he said.

The partnership aligns with Kenya's National Irrigation Sector Investment Plan (NISIP) 2025-2035, which aims to expand irrigation by an additional one million acres and improve productivity on the country's existing irrigated land. It also supports the country's broader ambition, the Irrigation and Water Security Compact 2026-2030, to increase the area under irrigation from about 760,000 acres to 1.5 million acres by 2030, creating 520,000 jobs and attracting significant public and private investment into the sector.

Drawing on its experience in sustainable infrastructure development in the region, UNOPS will provide technical expertise to support the State Department in preparing investment-ready projects and strengthening the long-term management of Irrigation assets.

Massimo Diana, Director of UNOPS East and Southern Africa Multi-Country Office, emphasized the importance of ensuring that irrigation investment delivers lasting impact for farmers and communities in Kenya.

"It is in our interest to see Kenya succeed in this important initiative. It is about managing water resources, increasing food security, reducing reliance on imports, and being prepared to address the challenges that come with climate change and increasingly erratic seasons. We are also keen to ensure that we look at asset management and the long-term sustainability of these investments, so that they continue delivering benefits 20 or 30 years from now," Massimo said.

By combining the State Department's leadership in the irrigation sector with UNOPS technical expertise, the partnership aims to support translating national irrigation priorities into practical solutions and investments that can support more reliable agricultural production, strengthen rural livelihoods and improve resilience to climate variability.

The MoU establishes a framework for cooperation over an initial period of two years and will be overseen by a Joint Implementation Committee made up of representatives from both institutions.

Through this partnership, the State Department for Irrigation and UNOPS reaffirm their commitment to supporting sustainable irrigation development, improved food security and inclusive socio-economic growth in line with Kenya's Vision 2030, with SDG 2, SDG 6, SDG 9, and SDG 13 at its core.

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About the State Department for Irrigation, Kenya

The State Department for Irrigation is a Government agency with the following mandate: National Irrigation Policy and Management; Water Harvesting and Storage for Irrigation; Management of Irrigation Schemes; Mapping, Designation and Development of Areas ideal for Irrigation Schemes; Development of Irrigation Infrastructure; and Land Reclamation.

About UNOPS in Kenya

UNOPS has partnered with the Government of Kenya since 1999 to deliver sustainable infrastructure, efficient procurement and project management. Supporting national priorities from resilient infrastructure to climate action, UNOPS works with the Government to translate national development priorities into lasting impact across the country. Read more: www.unops.org/kenya.