

ABSTRACT
**NILE WATERS MANAGEMENT AND LINKS TO
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND FOOD SECURITY IN
THE HORN OF AFRICA**
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The current asymmetry in military power and economic and political might argues forcefully against the success of any Nile Basin Initiative, and yet paradoxically the high-stakes interdependence of all the stakeholders may also be driving the initiative forward. This is because the Nile is so essential to the current and future development of each country in the basin. The Nile Waters present an opportunity for an "enclave approach" where shared needs and interests are used as a wedge to open better cooperation in all areas.

Those who wish to improve the management of the Nile Waters and reduce the potential for conflict in the Nile basin must, first of all, take into account several key factors that mitigate against significant progress.

Egypt has taken the view that "what is ours is ours and what is yours is open for discussion.". Realpolitik has entered into the behavior of the regional powers, with governments now covertly promoting violent rebel groups within each other's territories. Egypt's reluctance to give up its current share of the waters means changes are required not only in how food is produced and what varieties of crops are cultivated, it also means that a radical re-thinking in policy focus, negotiating strategy and in the type of projects that need to be promoted and successfully implemented. The explosive growth in both the population and food requirements mean an increased potential for both local and regional conflict. That fact combined with a shrinking water supply means the region urgently requires alternative lifestyles and policy options.

Escaping from this quandary means a shift in focus and in scale from the international and multi-lateral to the community. Yet any successful model must always be (at least in part) regional in scope, especially in terms of moving food freely within and across borders during times of distress. Given the many political and economic constraints, a major emphasis needs to be placed on small-scale water management for food production, irrigated crops, and the promotion of better health. The successful promotion of ground-up development begins when projects reach down to those closest to the land, respecting the rights of local people and empowering their communities to control projects because they have the greatest stake in their success.

The Nile River draws ten nations (Eritrea as only observer in the Nile Basin Initiative-NBI) into a relational system based on a common water resource. From water as a resource flows food, energy, industry, and life.

The Nile is more than a water resource, however. It has a life and a history all its own. Like other great rivers like the Yangze, Tigris, Euphrates, Ganges and Saint Laurence, it was pivotal in the evolution of sedentary life, agriculture and civilization. It was woven like a dominant pattern into the culture of the peoples living along its banks.

The Nile Basin takes in the northeastern quadrant of Africa. It is a vast region supporting hundreds of millions of people. The land of the Basin has been stained over the last half century—stained with the blood of more than three million people who have lost their lives through violent deep-rooted conflicts in which machetes, bullets and food deprivation all became weapons of death. Populations have been moved around, persecuted, and otherwise victimized. Territory that was once agricultural land has been flooded and pastures have been shaved of vegetation by lack of water. Time collapses in the psyches of those implicated so that the traumas of the past decade, century or even millennium seem to have occurred yesterday.

There is imbalance in the control of the basin's water. Control of the water downstream is far stronger compared to upstream. The result has been devastating to the upstream countries. Poverty, less water, more pollution and wastage, degradation of the land, inadequacy in food production have occurred at the same time as population growth has continued to explode and the power and economic strength of Egypt over the region has increased. The result has been the concept of "weak states struggling to find resources and services for their people." There seems to be no legal recourse by the "weaker countries" to international law because "International law is weak in terms of water rights." It was also felt by several participants that arguing over 'rights' is probably not the most productive way to go.

Most of the previous discussions between the "producers of water" and "users of water" stalled on the eternal conflict over who should have power over the waters. An attitudinal issue may be the crux here: the tendency has been to view conflict as a zero-sum game: "More for them must mean less for us." A paradigm shift needs to occur where there is a "win-win" objective and where stakeholders focus on "creating value rather than claiming value." One of the most positive suggestions towards changing that mindset was to create regional resource sharing or pooling and to develop sharing and pooling banks in times of need. The creation of a "water university" in combination with the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) supported by the International Joint Commission (IJC) of US-Canada, would facilitate that pooling of talent and resources and focus them when and where they are needed.

Any discussion of food security in the Nile Basin must begin with the fact that there are over 350 million people living in the Nile Basin region and that this number is growing every day. Egypt's reluctance to give up any of its current lion's share of the waters means changes are required in how food is produced and what varieties of crops are cultivated. Above all, the admixture of explosive growth in the population and a rapidly rising demand for food to shrinking water supply means the region urgently requires alternative lifestyles and policy options. The peoples of the region need to exchange antiquated traditional methods for more modern efficient techniques. The people desperately "need to share Best Practices and Right ideas on water study and find out what is going on elsewhere."

Food security involves managing the interaction of many independent variables. It also means the recognition of the "human right to water" and a "more equitable distribution" of the water supply, for without more water or water better managed, the current vulnerability of the people to the slightest hazards would continue.

Good management of the Nile Basin requires a focus on sustainable resource use and an understanding of the inter-connections between land use, (de) forestation, ground water and solar energy. The issue of desertification is pre-eminent. People create pockets of desertification by mismanagement of the land: the combination of overgrazing, deforestation, and lack of fuel create a vicious circle. There needs to be a massive re-education of the rural people so that they

do not cut down the replanted trees, allowing the trees to do their job of holding the soil. The Israeli example was cited approvingly and affirmed that it is possible to make the desert bloom. Achieving successful re-forestation and replanting must also start with the “buy-in of rural people.” Buying-in to land reform and equitable ownership of the land can lead to more responsibility and greater concern about the effects of traditional practices.