

The Relations of Nile Basin Countries after independence

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Abstract

The study clarifies the relations of Nile Basin countries after independence. Nile Basin countries are Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Egypt, North and newly independent South Sudan. Members of the region are independent in history; politics, economy and geography but tied by the Nile River. Economy determined by the agriculture supported by Pastoralism and agro-Pastoralism among the member countries. Their political development of the region was biased by the colonization and the cold war. From the time when the end of colonization and the cold war, the Nile basin countries can be attained relations in history, politics, economy and geography through the use of Nile Basin Initiative which played a role to the possibilities for cooperation and smooth relations among Nile basin countries.

Key words: Nile Basin, Relations, Nile Basin Initiative

1. Historical Context to Relations between the Nile Basin Countries

Nile Basin is the third largest international River system in the world following the Congo and Amazon. The basin is made up of eleven nations (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Egypt, North and newly independent South Sudan). Water is a critical resource for all countries that share the basin. This basin also consists of two main tributaries namely white Nile and blue Nile which originate from lake Victoria (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda) and lake Tana (Ethiopia) respectively. Those two main sources met at Khartoum to form the main Nile which continues on to Egypt (Elias, 2009:6).

The region composed one third of Ethiopia, a substantial portion of North and South Sudan, almost the entire cultivated and settled areas of Egypt, the whole of Uganda, Parts of Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, Zaire (Congo) and Eritrea (Yacob, 1997: 29). The riparian countries of the region can be identified by dividing them into upstream and downstream countries. Upstream groups are Burundi, the democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The three downstream countries include Egypt, North Sudan and newly independent South Sudan (Kristina, 2011:1). In most international River Basin, upstream country able to control the movement of water because they have the superior geographical location but the case among the Nile riparian is different. Egypt among downstream countries dominated the hydro-politics of the Nile Basin (*Ibid*: 2).

The Nile Basin countries are historically, politically, economically and geographically independent and bond by the Nile river umbilical cord. With absence of genuine cooperation there was no characterization. The Nile serves no purpose other than deep difference among the riparian and aggravating the state of poverty in the basin. Geographically, there are various interrelated geographic regions that found in the Nile basin (the tropical highlands, the transitional wet and the dry savannas and the desert). Each of those regions is relatively homogenous and distinct from others. Nile River is the only geographic feature common to all three (Carry, 1949:270). There is a strong cultural difference among the three regions of the Nile Basin. Also, the significant elements are race, religion, language and manner living in which contrasts occur (*Ibid*: 273).

Historically, water utilization in the Eastern Nile Basin has been unilateral and there are no effective inter-riparian legal that can facilitate cooperative development and joint planning activities between upstream and downstream riparian areas (Yacob, 2007:26). The three downstream countries including Ethiopia were the sole beneficiaries from the Nile waters, basing their respective claims on 'historical' and 'natural' rights doctrine throughout twentieth century (*Ibid*:.30). Economically, the backbone of the Nile basin is agriculture accompanied by pastoralism and agro-pastoralism. The riparian nations in the region are the largest water user for the agricultural development and livestock products will increase demand on the basin accesses of water resources (*Ibid*: 203).

Politically, the Nile Basin comprises parts of the Belgium Congo, Tanganyika territory, Kenya colony, Ethiopia, nearly the entire Uganda, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and the important part of Egypt (Dougals, 1949:269). As known in the past, conflict in the Nile is basically matched to the allocation and uses of water among the riparian states. The challenging for regime formation in the region is especially difficult due to historic water sharing agreements. Most of existing agreements between the Nile riparian states were made under the rule of colonial powers and until now there have been no legal agreements between all Nile riparian states (Kristina, 2011:15).

After 1960's the technical cooperation among the Nile riparian states was awakened due to the rising population and development needs in the fields of agriculture, industry and energy in the riparian countries couple with decolonization of some countries such as Congo Democratic Republic, Burundi and Rwanda from the Belgium in the 1960 and Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya gained their independence from the British in the 1961, 1962 and 1963 respectively (Elias, 2009:85). Those factors facilitated some of agreements signed after the demise colonialism and present some important international cooperative efforts in the post-colonial Nile Basin (*Ibid*:86). Despite previous problem, the Nile riparian countries embarked a new spirit of cooperation with clear departure from confrontational past to a

cooperative future. Countries of the basin were embarking on cooperation “without prejudice to all the rights and obligations each riparian state” has under international law to the equitable use of the Nile (*Ibid*: 105). Cooperation between upper and lower riparian to share water resources equitably may finally lead to the avoidance of conflict and even to the integration of basin countries. The cooperation in water resources will results the positive impact on their economic and political areas. Nile basin countries have worked together on mutual projects. This enhanced the multilateral cooperation between other Nile Basin countries in the recent time (Aaron, 2001:4).

Since the Nile Basin Initiative founded in 1991 is trying to bring all riparian states is the basin in to one regime and consequently new organization. The Nile Basin Initiative is intended to promote “sustainable socio-economic development through equitable utilization of benefit from the common Nile basin water resources” (Elias,2009:112).In order to possible for cooperation rather than conflict under the impact of global change and in line with development from work, the cooperation of the Nile Basin countries within the Nile Basin initiative enhanced a more cooperative by the following factors(J.Jope and Brunna,2002:141).

Someof the factors tending toward competition persist and promote cooperative efforts among the Nile Basin countries after independence from colonial rule. First, the use of Nile water is recognized widely as unsustainable largely because of population growth and growing irrigation. Thisrecognition result the increasing population pressure in the countries of Ethiopia, Uganda, North and South Sudan for a comprehensive regime to regulate the Nile. Secondly, Ethiopia’s relative political stability and economic strength have led to a realization on that more substantial water use by the state (*Ibid*). Thirdly, not all action on the Nile creates winner and losers. A fourth factor promoting regime change from conflict into cooperation is the active engagement multilateral and bilateral donors (*Ibid*).

The Nile Basin Initiative enhances the regional cooperation and build mutually beneficial relationships among the eleven riparian nations of Nile Basin (Yacob,1997:31). Hence, the Nile Basin countries, international community and international agencies like the World Bank and United Nation Development Program have recognized the importance of developing regional relationships through the Nile Basin Initiative (*Ibid*). Relations of the Nile Basin countries encourages riparian states to establishstrong cooperation in sectors other than water development paving the way for more fruitful and peaceful relations among countries. The negotiations of riparian states in the Nile Basin should continue focusing on “benefit sharing” and win- win option instead of the “water-sharing” strategy that usually ends up in the emphasis of conflicts among countries over water (Teshome, 2008:41).

The investigation explores the riparian states in the Nile basin should work for water sharing and this should be the basis for their trans-boundary cooperation. This study aimed to focus on the relations of Nile basin countries after independence in terms of economic, political, finally about the colonial and cold war legacy.

2. Methodology

This article has developed based on secondary sources, where the secondary documents and publications focusing on the issue. The secondary sources are collected from periodicals, document analysis, Thesis dissertations, internet sources and other reports. Data collected through this method would be carefully examined, cross-checked, interpreted and analyzed, to give meaningful justifications for the study.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Political development among the Nile Basin Countries

To a significant degree, the political context in the Nile Basin is conditioned by the region's colonial history and the strategic concerns of its colonial powers. Control over and the competition among colonial powers in order to control source of Nile were central colonial preoccupations, pursued either through efforts to gain direct control over key areas or through treaties designed to establish legal control over the Nile (J. Jope and Brunna, 2002:122). The colonial patterns of competition and quest for control were shown to persist by the newly independent states in the region and the influence of a competitive legal environment continues between riparian nations. Aside from concerns over water resources, there is a range of border disputes and political disagreements that have undermined cooperation among the Nile riparian's (*Ibid*: 129). The riparian nations were supported the armed group one another. For example, Kenya and Uganda support the SPLA in Southern Sudan has enhanced tension, as has Sudanese support for the Lord's Day Army fighting Ugandan authorities in the northern parts of the country (*Ibid*). This fostered consequently upstream-downstream relation along a shared river may entail competitive use or even conflicts (A. Mason, 2005:115). The Nile countries are far from the "scorpion level" (damaging the opponents but there is "ostrich-like" behavior i.e. ignoring unilateral development (*Ibid*: 117).

Since 1990's, the emergence of independent nations in the region and the end of cold war brought a stable relief in the Nile Basin countries because the danger of confrontation among the Nile Basin countries was less acute and the level of cooperation is achieved (Elias, 2009:93). Due to this, downstream especially Egypt cannot longer maintain her power and monopoly over the Nile waters. However, despite the shift from confrontation to cooperation in the relations among some riparian states of the basis others still persist in their firm position by denying the

legitimate right of other riparian to an equitable use of an international water course (*Ibid*:94). This creates an obstacle for any meaningful negotiation on the water of the Nile. For example, the demands of Egypt concerning the Nile are not only limited to satisfying their interests. This hindrance tackled the Nile Basin countries to develop mutual benefit for all riparian's (*Ibid*: 96).

In order to realize mutual benefit, the Nile basin countries left many concrete steps to address obstacles and that cooperative development holds the greatest prospects of bringing prosperity to the whole region. The Current and future challenges by correcting the past mistakes. Charting new courses would enable the riparian of the Nile Basin to be full participants in the use and development of their common water resources through the effort of Nile Basin Initiative (*Ibid*: 98). This section is review of these important development which paved the way mutual (upper stream and downstream) countries benefit and practical cooperation. The Nile Basin countries have entered into a new chapter and will tackle challenges for the future to improve the standard of living for their people through collaboration rather than confrontation. This forced the eleven Nile Basin countries in launching the international temporary for cooperation on national and regional actions needed to address the trans- boundary priorities (Uitto and M.Dud, 2020:375).

3.1. Economic Cooperation of the Nile Basin Countries

The principal economy of the Nile Basin countries is agriculture supported by Pastoralism and agro-Pastoralism. The countries of Nile upper basin depend mainly on rain water for agricultural cultivation. They utilize the Nile water for both irrigation and hydroelectric generation. The lower riparian's are totally depend on the Nile water for their irrigation and hydroelectric power generation (Elias, 2009:21). In addition to this, they also depend on navigation, fishing and tourism sector (Yacob, 1997:41). In the Nile basin, the upper riparian are "suppliers" while the lower riparian are "utilizers" (Elias, 2009:21).

In terms of economic factors, the riparian of the region produce the same things and followed interchange trade that brought a true unity of the Nile valley (Dougals, 1949:274). But, they are at different levels of development. The riparian countries to feed the population and in the area of trade can opt for cooperation than competition to maximize their respective benefits (Wael, 2011:165). This shows that there are a basin wide and active cooperation for conflict prevention in the Nile basin as well as to deliver equitable benefit to all potentials of the water resource development. The lower and upper riparian could be a force to foster peace and to reduce old enemies to cooperate for the common good (Elias, 2009:111). Cooperative efforts of Nile basin countries finally could lead to full scale wide economic integration, win-win formula with acceptable and workable mechanisms accommodating the common economic interests and legitimate needs of each of the riparian states, export of

hydro-electric power, increasing food production for export as well as for self-sufficiency purpose, development of modern interstate water and roadways and on increased cross-border trading. All are examples of the value for cooperation in the Nile Basin which will be favorable economic results to each country and to the individual basin as whole (*Ibid*).

3.2. The Effects of Colonial Legacy and Cold War on the Relations between Nile Basin Countries

The colonial history and cold war ignored the interests and rights of the upstream countries. In the colonial era, there was no space for the Nile Basin states to act bilaterally or multilaterally as regards their shared water or any other inter-state concerns. Britain imperial time was more interested in political dominance than in promoting interstate cooperation (Yacob, 2007:89). Ethiopia, on the other hand, as the only independent nation in the region was more concerned with maintaining its independence than in developing the nation's water resources. The power asymmetry between the colonial power in the downstream and the relatively weak positions of Ethiopia in the upstream was one of the obstacles to reaching any upstream-downstream cooperation during the colonial period (*Ibid*: 148).

Numerous agreements concluded in both colonial and post-colonial period have ignored the interests and rights of the upstream and exaggerated the Ethio-Somalia frontier dispute. After demise of colonialism in the Nile basin, the downstream states and Somalia's have been unwilling to accept the situation of colonial agreement where in a regime of cooperation and mutual benefit could be established (*Ibid*:104). The Somalia according to Anglo-Ethiopian treaty of 1897 lost her territory because the regions of Haud and so called "Reserved areas" been recognized by the British government as Ethiopian territory. Colonial agreements after independence of Somalia result the border dispute between Ethiopia and Somalia. Especially unwillingness of downstream states and emergence of Nile Basin Initiative as a new deal enhanced a good and interesting relations between the upstream and downstream nations (Brown, 1956:245).

Colonial powers in the time of pre-cold War period namely Great Britain, France, Italy, Belgium and Germany were all involved in the conflicts between the imperialist forces and local polities were resolved by means of forces while the conflicts among the colonial powers were resolved through diplomacy. With regard to Ethiopia, the colonial power used both force and diplomatic methods in order to achieve their interests (Yacob, 2007:205). During cold war era, the political regimes in the Sub-basin were different in the ideological and politico-strategic to put themselves either the "Western" or the "Eastern camp" (*Ibid*: 212).

Ethiopia was also placed under the shadow of the British colonial control in the quite enemy of friendship, cooperation and assistance. The role of external actors in the

post-cold war have begun to attempt to resolve the conflicting issues through encouraging and supporting negotiation between Nile Basin countries through effort of Nile Basin Initiative (*Ibid*). Therefore, the conflict among Nile Basin countries can part be viewed as legacy of the colonial and cold war rivalries, the politico-economic developments at the global and regional level as the role of third parties in the negotiation process are key explanatory variable in a comprehensive assessment of the current status of the trans-boundary relations in the Nile Basin (Luezi, 2007:21).

4. Conclusion

The Nile Basin is largest international river system in the world next to Congo and Amazon. Burundi, Democratic Republic Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Egypt, North and Newly independent South Sudan are riparian countries in the region. Those countries are historically, politically, economically, geographically independent and bond by the Nile river. The Nile Basin nations are economically dependent on the fishing, tourism, hydroelectric power, navigation following their back bone agriculture. Their political development was highly influenced by the colonization and cold war. But, after collapse of colonialism and the end of cold war, the political, geographical, historical and economic interactions can be achieved among the riparian states through Nile Basin Initiative. The Nile Basin Initiative has taken steps to move from an unsustainable and uncooperative situation in the Nile basin to one cooperative and sustainable resource. It takes an optimistic look at the possibilities for cooperation and smooth relationships of the Nile Basin countries.

Conflict interests

The author has not declared any conflict interests.

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