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## **Is it one Nile? Civic engagement and hydropolitics in the Eastern Nile Basin: the case of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia**

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## Chapter Seven

### **Network Dynamics: Four Modalities of Relations in the Eastern Nile Basin**

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#### 7.1 Introduction

The civil society actors in the Eastern Nile Basin network occupy different relations that reflect the actors' objectives and capabilities as well as their identity and how they position themselves across various scales. These attributes and relationships of the civil society actor - as an individual node - delineate its position in the network.

In the previous chapters I have described the Eastern Nile Basin networks' structure, including the nodes and ties connecting them. This chapter investigates the engagement of four sample modalities from the three countries to explore the dynamics of joining a network or establishing a new one and how it became visible in Nile politics.

#### 7.2 Partnership capability: the Egyptian Nile Discourse Forum (Eg-NDF)

The civic engagement of the Egyptian Nile Discourse Forum (Eg-NDF) in Eastern Nile politics is built on a partnership arrangement as a principle strategy. At the outset, the founders engaged in global environment conferences which gave them a space through which to interact with global civil society. Therefore, they have evolved reasonable connections with donor agencies to fundraise for their activities across regional as well as local levels. Hence, the activities of the Eg-NDF demonstrate the partnership practices in the Eastern Nile Basin across the levels, and through that, it has reconfigured the Nile issue in accordance with the partnership relations.

### 7.2.1 The access: global environmental activism

The UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 embarked on civil society engagement in the sphere of environmental policies. Through this initial conference and the subsequent Earth Summits,<sup>43</sup> the role of civil society was framed to implement and evaluate environmental policies; in addition to communicating grassroots-level needs and interests to decision makers (Bernauer and Betzold, 2012). In this global articulation of civic engagement, the founders of the Eg-NDF engaged in the environmental sphere. In the 1970s, the founders were interested in science and the environment, so they had been part of the Egyptian Science Clubs that were incubated by the Al-Ahram institution in Cairo. After participation in the Earth Summit in 1972, they formulated their activities by establishing the Arab Office for Youth and Environment (AOYE) in 1978, and legally registered it as an NGO in 1990 (Interview 4).

AOYE became the establishing organisation in which the founders retained their global and regional engagement with civil society and donor agencies. In 1990, the same year of AOYE registration, the founders established the Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED) as a regional network of CSOs in the field of environment and sustainable development. AOYE incubates this Arab Network as well. Moreover, Eg-NDF is stated as one of AOYE's projects and forms part of the RAED network (Arab Network for Environment and Development [RAED], n.d.; Anna Linda Foundation, n.d.).

In this case they have employed the notion of partnership to conflate the functions of CSOs headed by the same founders. When I visited the office of Eg-NDF, six plaques depicting different organisations were mounted at the entrance. These are the Arab Office of Youth and Environment (AOYE), the Egyptian Sustainable Development Forum (ESDF), the Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED), the Egyptian Organisation of Consumers and Energy, the Global Environmental Facility - Small Grants Programme (GEF/SGP), and the Egypt National

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<sup>43</sup> Earth summits are the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) to discuss environmental challenges, population and development. They started in Stockholm (Sweden) in 1972; then in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 1992; this was a remarkable summit as it was held after the end of the Cold War and the uprising of the sustainable development discourse; therefore, it became a reference for the subsequent summits e.g. Rio+5 (in 1997); Rio+10 (in 2002).

Discourse Forum (Eg-NDF). The interview respondent explained that these organisations share the office and the staff for administration work. In addition, the founders occupy the head positions in the boards of all of these organisations.

These CSOs were formed for different reasons, most commonly because there was similarity of scope (environment and sustainable development). They were often founded in response to looming environmental challenges, to engage the global discourse which has undeniably been integrated into the national policies and donors' agendas. The interviewee demonstrated that the activities had been reoriented in the vein of the pressing global and national issues. For instance, the Sustainable Development Forum was established in July 2012 after a month of participating in the Earth Summit 2012 (Rio+20). The organisation's mandate is to provoke ideas and practices of sustainable development in the national strategies. Therefore, through this Forum they participated in the national and regional (the Arab League) discussions of implementing the Sustainable Development goals (SDGs) (Interview 3; Egyptian Sustainable Development Forum [ESDF], n.d.).

The activism of the Eg-NDF founders depicts how they have conveyed the global discourse of environmental challenges and sustainability into the national and regional levels. In addition to this, this activism has been endorsed by donors' disbursements. Accordingly, the websites of these organisations explicitly indicate their partnerships with UN agencies (e.g. UNDP, UNEP) and donors' agencies (e.g. the EU and DFID).

Transferring the global cause to the national level has been an attribute of environmental activism in Egypt in general. The globally engaged activists have been 'bilateral activists' who have the capability of understating the national dynamics. At the same time, they have been aware of global interests and various resources available (Sowers, 2007:379). The founders of Eg-NDF, for example, have been 'bilateral activists' who have utilised their global networks for national and regional purposes.

### 7.2.2 NBD: leading the initiation

Dr. Emad Adly was the leading founder of the aforementioned organisations. His engagement was a product of his participation in the Earth Summits and his connections with the donor organisations. Notably, he founded and coordinated the national office of the UNDP (GEF/SGP) (Interview 3; Global Environmental Facility - Small Grants Programme [GEF], 2012).

Regarding Dr. Adly's engagement in water issues, he has contended that there was only a small number of CSOs working in water-related affairs. He explained that this limitation of civic engagement is due to a shortage of funds. Furthermore, the required scientific data to design the activities is not available to assist donors and CSOs to engage in water issues on an ongoing basis. Therefore, Dr. Adly identified the role of CSOs in the water field to disseminate scientific research results and promote the use of advanced technology to improve water productivity either for irrigation or for household use. Additionally, CSOs can organise advocacy campaigns on water saving (Adly and Ahmed, 2009). Importantly, Dr. Adly adopted the global assumption of the role of CSOs in channelling the grassroots-level voices with respect to their complaints and concerns of water problems to decision makers

In view of that, Dr. Adly argues that the NBD and GWP in Egypt have filled the gap, i.e. the lack of active CSOs in the water field, through their networking with relevant actors in the field, including collaboration with governments and private sectors, besides providing scientific and knowledge capacity to CSOs. Accordingly, these two CSOs were able to contribute to Nile governance and development of the Nile River (Adly and Ahmed, 2009).

To some extent, two networks' activities have endorsed Dr. Adly's engagement in the Nile Basin region. The first network was his global network of civil society and donor organisations in the field of sustainable development. The second network consisted of the WB, donors, and the Nile riparian countries. As a consequence of the activities of these two networks, in 2001, Dr. Adly was invited alongside the other eight representatives of CSOs in the Nile Basin countries to participate in the ICCON meeting, where the idea of the NBD was generated, as explained in chapter five of

this dissertation (Interview 3; Nile Voices, 2010b). Following the meeting, Dr. Adly was active in preparing meetings of the NBD and mobilised DFID in the global platforms, as discussed in chapter five. As a result of convening capability and global connections, Dr. Adly occupied a leading position as the chairman of the NBD (Nile Voices, 2010b). For connecting with NBD, the founder used similar strategies to integrate the global discourse at the national level through establishing a distinct CSO. For example, the Eg-NDF was founded to be a national focal point of the regional NBD, and it is a legally independent NGO.

On this Nile Basin level, the Eg-NDF engagement reflects the ecological and hydraulic position of Egypt as a downstream country that has to advocate for cooperation without negating the national discourse of historical rights to the Nile water. These frames have been elaborated in two modes of contestation in Eastern Nile politics due to CFA and the GERD.

Regarding the CFA, which was signed in 2010, the general position of the NDFs is to 'not take sides in this debate'. However, as NDFs represent civil society, they have strived to attain cooperation in the Nile Basin through accentuating the principles of reciprocity and consensus. Nevertheless, the general position statement by NDFs have pointed out that the public had not been informed about the content of negotiations over CFA, and they were not included in this agreement (Nile Voices, 2010a:2).

Therefore, the NBD as a regional organisation induced the NDFs to address the status of CFA negotiations in their activities. The NBD monthly newsletters covered public discussions over the CFA by the NDFs. However, the positions of NDFs did not diverge from their governments. The Ethiopian position (in a multi-stakeholder meeting organised by EtNDF) affirmed the benefits of CFA to reconstruct Nile cooperation on the basis of 'equitable water usage', which consequently would reflect securing food and development for the Ethiopian people (Tesera, 2010:6). The Ugandan NDF put forward a similar position by referencing their 'Understanding of the justification and implications of positions of Egypt and Sudan' (Nile Voices, 2010c:4). These Ethiopian and Ugandan stances are contradictory to the Egyptian position, however, that has not signed the CFA.

Similarly, the Eg-NDF has released a position statement in 2010 that revealed the general Egyptian narrative of the necessity of cooperation to secure the flow of the river. The statement built its argument on the slogan of the NBD, namely 'one Nile, one family'. Additionally, it reiterated the discourse of trust-building and scientific studies to invest in Nile resources and to attain cooperation (Nile Voices, 2010c). The statement, however, did not mention CFA as a cause of dispute. Unlike the Ugandan and Ethiopian NDFs, the Eg-NDF avoided discussing their position against the CFA explicitly. Contrarily, it was framed under the cooperation narrative. However, later in 2012, the articulation of cooperation changed to defend the Egyptian national position. In a Report of the Third Multi-Stakeholder Forum on January 12, 2012, the Eg-NDF urged for 'the Egyptian rights in the Nile water' with a pursuit of Nile Basin cooperation. Furthermore, the suggested strategy to attain this cooperation was 'public diplomacy' to induce the building of mutual understanding of countries' water needs on 'the public level', and the Eg-NDF presumed that would be sufficient for retaining the historical rights (Nile Voices, 2012b:4).

The second mode of contestation relates to the GERD. The tool of public diplomacy was employed in the GERD confrontation in 2011. The Eg-NDF was part of the Egyptian public diplomacy delegation to Uganda and Ethiopia, whose activism was explained in chapter five of this dissertation. The Eg-NDF participated in this delegation, although the Eg-NDF was not the organiser of this public diplomacy mission. The Eg-NDF representative underlined that his role in the delegation was to inform the delegation members about the status of the Nile cooperation and to articulate their points of view in accordance with the Nile cooperation. Furthermore, he explained the objective of the NBD and its relation with the NBI to the other members (Nada, 2011). This practice of engagement demonstrates the diverse activities of the Eg-NDF networks. Despite this, the other three members in the delegation I interviewed did not mention this significant role of the Eg-NDF, but instead capitalised on their delegation as a self-motivated action.

With the ongoing GERD confrontation, the Eastern Nile Basin group in the NBD organised two visits for civil society activists and academics, besides the NBD members, to the Egyptian and Ethiopian cities. The purpose was to stimulate public interactions by creating a space for conversation and sharing information on the real needs and challenges of the two countries. The



first visit was in the Minia governorate in Upper Egypt in October 2011, followed by a visit to Bahir Dar city, the source of the Blue Nile in Ethiopia in January 2012 (Nile Voices, 2011; Nile Voices, 2012a) . These exchange visits contributed to raising awareness of livelihood conditions. One of the Egyptian participants in the visit to Bahir Dar revealed that this visit had enabled him to see the extent of the people's suffering due to lack of basic human needs in the villages. Besides that, it was an opportunity to visit the source of the Nile for the first time (Interview 11).

The aforementioned examples of the Eg-NDF's civic engagement in Nile politics were partly possible because of the availability of funds to cover the expenses of exchange visits, for example. The NBD interviewees at the regional and national levels remembered the period of DFID funding as a glorious time because they were able to conduct regional meetings, workshops and arrange exchange visits. They could thus discuss their interests and positions. After this funding cycle had ended, transnational activities became limited, although the WB intervened and supported the organisation to continue.

However, this civic activism has not been echoed in Eastern Nile politics in general because of two major reasons: The first is the weak ties with the NBI. Even though the purpose of the NBD is to voice the concerns of the local peoples regarding water projects, the involvement of CSOs is not paramount in the decision-making mechanisms. The Eg-NDF's respondent revealed that the discussion of the proposed projects by the NBI was conducted by the high-level executives at the headquarters. However, the board members of the NBD who represent the national forums have not been invited to the meetings with the NBI. Therefore, much information has been shared and decisions taken without proper discussions with the national forums (Interview 3). Furthermore, at ENTRO level, the NDFs of the Eastern Basin released a position statement in 2011 on Nile cooperation. They claimed that the interests of local communities had not been integrated into the transboundary projects designed by ENTRO, as discussed before in chapter six (section 6.2.1).

The second reason concerns the interwoven relations between the state and civil society. The prolonged GERD contestation reflects how national interests dominate the regional collaboration. For example, the ENTRO representatives were part of a group who visited the GERD construction site in 2016. The group included journalists from the Eastern Nile Basin, representatives from NBI,

and NBD, including a member from Eg-NBD who represented Egypt in the NBD's General Assembly. This visit was organised by the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), aiming to create a dialogue over a contested issue (NBD, 2016). In this endeavour, a global water think tank, i.e. SIWI and not ENTRO, led this transboundary conversation; though hydropower projects in Ethiopia were part of ENTRO founding of regional projects<sup>44</sup>. Moreover, in 2020 with the escalation of contestation over the first filling of the GERD reservoir, before reaching an agreement, the Executive Director of ENTRO (Mr. Fekahmed Negash) spoke to the media explaining that the Dam is a national project that has been constructed inside Ethiopian sovereign territory and financed by Ethiopians (Ethiopian News Agency, 2020). The involvement of ENTRO in a contested regional issue shows it has not had network-making power. It has not initiated a networking activity to connect the contested actors or reformulate the network it has (based on its technical activities) to attain the regional collaboration mandate. In contrast, the GERD issue has been tackled as a national project.

Similarly, the Eg-NDF has not been part of the Egyptian negotiation team, although a representative of the Eg-NDF was part of the public diplomacy delegation in 2011. In contrast to this state behaviour concerning CSO engagement in the negotiations, the Eg-NDF embodied the Egyptian Government's stance towards the GERD. I encountered this during my participation in the NBD symposium in 2017. Although the participants and attendees were from CSOs or were scholars from universities and research centres, the Eg-NDF delegation disagreed with an Ethiopian presentation about the GERD benefits for the Ethiopian people. At the same time, there was no presentation to demonstrate the Egyptian position. What's more, the Eg-NDF group expressed their disagreement by withdrawing from the session to demonstrate that the presentation had no value for this occasion where civil society had to find common ground for cooperation. After their withdrawal, the Sudanese member of the NDF, who had been elected recently to be the chairperson of the NBD Board, tried to convince the Egyptian group to return to the room. This incident was captured in the Ugandan media, addressing how the Egyptians had become 'politicised' despite the fact that the summit was meant to emphasise cooperation (Mayemba,

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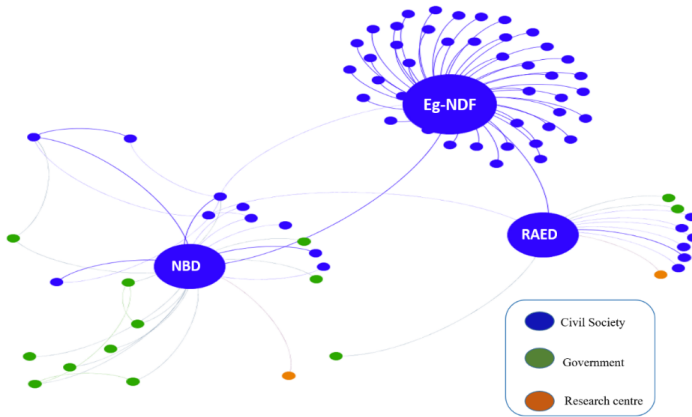
<sup>44</sup> The potential of generating hydropower in Ethiopia was part of technical studies prepared by ENTRO. The project 'Joint Multipurpose Program' aimed to conduct studies that addressed transboundary water investments, including hydropower construction and power transmission. However, coinciding with the disagreement over the CFA, Egypt did not approve the studies. See for example Cascão and Nicol (2016).

2017). This action of withdrawal is similar to the governments' tool to express their controversy in formal settings. Still, this behaviour depicts how the Eg-NDF abandoned the cooperation discourse they had formulated in 2011 and 2012 in the aforementioned Report, and through exchange visits and the public diplomacy delegation. On the other hand, the behaviour of the Eg-NBD coincided with the intensifying conflict between the two Governments and the negotiation was stalled in November 2017, a few weeks before the NBD summit. Given that, the Eg-NBD behaviour is a reflection of the governments' tensions.

### 7.2.3 The broker position and weak ties

The partnership strategy enables Eg-NDF to be in a broker position among three civil society networks: the affiliated national/local CSOs, the Arab region and the Nile Basin. To demonstrate that, I applied the 'ego network setting' in the Gephi program which extracted the close connections of the selected node (the Eg-NDF). Figure 7.1 illustrates the Eg-NDF position between the NBD network and the RAED network as well as its central position for the local CSOs. The connection with the NBD is based on the organisational relation as the Eg-NDF is the national focal point of the regional organisation. Through the NBD network, the Eg-NDF can connect with the intergovernmental organisations in the Nile Basin (e.g. NBI- ENTRO) and the other NDFs. At the same time, it represents the local CSOs in the NBD at the regional level. By comparison, the Eg-NDF connects with the Arab based organisations through RAED which is managed by the same founders and staff of Eg-NDF.

Figure 7.1 The Eg-NDF networks



Source: own graphical representation produced by Gephi software. It is based on data collected from interviews and internet resources of civil society organisations, initiatives and research entities. The node size of Eg-NDF, NBD and RAED has been changed for illustrative purposes.

The Eg-NDF, represented by its founders, seems to find itself in a broker position between the two regions. The strategy of establishing legal and structured CSOs in response to global and regional opportunities empowered the founders in environment and water fields in the two regions. The mingling of organisational and managerial arrangements of the Eg-NDF and RAED enabled the two CSOs to join their international and regional programs and projects. In the Arab region, the founders are active under RAED representation and the connections are built on implementing joint activities. For instance, they were members of the working group founded by the Arab Ministerial Water Council to formulate the water development module of the Arab Vision of SDG 2030 (FAO, 2018). Furthermore, they conducted the background surveys and studies for the water and sanitation reports issued by the Arab League (League of Arab States, UN ESCWA, ACWUA, 2016). Similarly, RAED was exemplified as an active Arab network in advocacy for mitigating water challenges and climate change through networking with other organisations in the region (Verner, 2012; UN-Habitat, 2010). In the Nile region, the founders act under the Eg-NDF according to the NBD agenda and controversial issues (CFA and GERD), as already discussed.

Moreover, the interactions with the NBI or ENTRO occur through the NBD, while in the Arab network, the founders have direct interactions with the Arab League and the Council of Arab Water Ministers.

Accordingly, as discussed by Castells (2016) in chapter three, Eg-NDF plays a 'switcher' role by creating relations with the Nile and Arab networks. These connections increase funding opportunities as well as representation among the other actors. Despite the visible position among the Nile and Arab regions, the impetus of activism is to seize upon global and regional discourses and funding opportunities. The documents of the Eg-NDF and RAED depict the functional/implementation activities instead of transferring the resources or political positions between the two regions and the playing of a broker role.

Furthermore, figure 7.1 shows the types of organisations in the close networks of Eg-NDF: civil society (blue nodes) and governmental entities (green nodes) are more frequent than the research centres (orange nodes). This composition of nodes reflects that actors build a partnership with comparable actors that have similar objectives. The few connections with research centres can be explained by the educational capabilities of the founders: they are highly educated and specialised in the environmental field; therefore, they have been able to conduct scientifically-based research.

Regarding its connections with local CSOs, the Eg-NDF, as the national representative of the NBD, decided which local CSOs can join the NBD network. The founders set two identifiers: one was the location and the second was a subjective assessment. In terms of location, the Eg-NDF designated 17 governorates besides Cairo, which are located on the watershed of the Nile. After that, the founders chose well-known CSOs subjectively (Interview 4). The Eg-NDF built up the list of local Discourse Forums (LDFs), which is evidence of the link between the NBD at the regional and local levels.

However, besides CSOs, this list of LDFs includes individuals and members who are affiliated to the local government apparatus.<sup>45</sup> This combination of membership reflects the notion of partnership as envisioned by the Eg-NDF founders. The interview respondent affirmed that the lesson learnt from their activities constitutes the collaboration between the three sectors: government, the private sector and civil society (Interview 3). Alternatively, the strategy of partnership endorses the network state when the government joins civil society to consolidate its legitimacy. As shown before, Dr. Adly believes in cooperating with the governmental bodies to solve water challenges. However, this relation has not reached significant levels of cooperation with the MWRI although Dr. Adly's organisations, i.e. AOYE, are visible to decision makers as a structured CSO in the water sector (Luzi, 2007).

The CSOs in the LDFs design their annual activity plans and share these with the Eg-NBF that accordingly attempts to fund these activities. The respondent described that their relations with LDFs was strong at the beginning because the Eg-NDF could channel funds to implement local activities, but the shortage of funds turned the strong connections into weak ties. The respective respondent explained that 'this bad relation doesn't come from us or the secretariat [NBD]; it comes from donors' (Interview 3). Moreover, the interviewee pointed out that the conditionality of donors is another reason that constrains the local activities. The donors allocated disbursements for the regional activities in the fields of awareness and capacity building rather than financing the tailored national demands. In view of that, the interviewee demanded at the NBD regional meetings to allocate donors' disbursements to the national base (Interview 3).

To confront the lack of funds, the Eg-NBF appeals to the local CSOs to include the Nile River in their strategies by conducting low-cost activities such as cleaning up campaigns and advocacy activities in schools (Interview 3). At this point, it is worth mentioning an example of local activities implemented by a CSO in the LDFs in the Beni Suif governorate. The head of this CSO presented these activities at the occasion of the Nile Day (2017) celebrations in Egypt, and the Eg-

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<sup>45</sup> The available full list of Eg-NDF members on the NBD website shows the composition of affiliated CSOs. Some of them are faith-based associations (e.g. Ragaia Coptic Charity Association, Doshna and Islamic Charity Association in Farshout); other members are federations of NGOs (e.g. NGOs Federation Union, Nile Basin Media network, and Environmental Union Federation); additionally, the corporate social responsibility (Farid Khamis Association) appears in the list. Accordingly, the scope of operations is broad and includes community development, women, youth, environment, urban, agriculture and media.

NDF respective respondent shared this presentation with me to indicate their relations with the local CSOs. In the presentation, the Nile was framed as a national river, and that Egypt is under threat of losing its Nile share, which is compatible with the global and national discourse of water scarcity. Among the other implemented development activities, the Nile-related actions included awareness campaigns on hygiene and clean water in addition to providing poor houses with water pipelines and cleaning irrigation canals (Abdel Hamid, 2017). So, at the local level, the Nile is framed as a national river due to the shortage of foreign aid to fund exchange visits or other projects as well as the role of the Eg-NDF (broker position) in identifying local activities concerning the Nile.

To conclude, the Eg-NDF has been able to maintain its engagement in the Nile networks due to its long-term expertise in the field of environment and sustainability, which dates back to the 1970s. Accordingly, the founders have been establishing partner relationships with global, regional and national organisations. Moreover, the founders paid attention to structuring these forms of partnership in order to have a legal format which in turn enabled them to move across geographical levels and conduct different activities.

### 7.3 Youth volunteerism: the Sudanese Youth Parliament for Water (SYPW)

The youth engagement in the SYPW demonstrates how the global discourse of youth participation in decision making has been reconfigured as a response to the political context and Nile politics. The activism of the SYPW is highlighted to reflect professional capacity building and the raising of awareness about SDG 6.

#### 7.3.1 Global thrive: youth engagement in water decision making

Youth involvement in water governance has been advocated by the UN agencies as well as international research organisations. The emphasis on youth resonates with multiple mandates. The foremost one is the population focus as the growth of the youth population in developing countries causes a reflection on their struggle to fetch water for their households; because they

have physical capabilities, their communities ask them to fetch water. Additionally, with urbanization, young people are vulnerable to get adequate public services, including water. Therefore, the UNICEF Chart, for example, emphasises the right of the youth, with children to have safe and accessible clean water (Burlleson, 2008; Owen and Goldin, 2015).

Interwoven with this demographic consideration, the development focus also endorses youth engagement to attain participatory and inclusive development. On the other hand, empirical studies capitalise on the agency of youth as an educated cohort who have potentially strong roles to play in conserving the environment and managing water resources (Garcia and Brown, 2009; Ballard et al., 2017).

The global discourse on youth engagement in water governance has been constituted in an increasing number of youth-based organisations and networks. Furthermore, research centres and think tanks have created specialised programs for youth and water. The Geneva Water Hub has a platform that encourages young people to develop ideas about water and peace.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the International Water Association formulated the Young Water Professionals organisation that aims to provide skills and opportunities for highly educated youth in the water sector<sup>47</sup>. Also, the Water Youth Network is an online platform that works on linking young professionals in the water sector across the world and updating them with research and project opportunities<sup>48</sup>.

The WYPW, as explained in chapters five and six, is one among these youth-based entities which targets highly educated young calibres. It promotes youth engagement in decision making and therefore, has sturdy ties with the World Water Forum where the young people can present their ideas to private sectors and ultimately, to decision makers.

In this global dynamic, the founder of the SYPW demonstrated how the global space was the access point to give thrust to civil society at the national level. The founder was introduced to the WYPW during graduate study, which facilitated participation in the World Water Forum in South

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<sup>46</sup> See Geneva Water Hub: <https://www.genevawaterhub.org/platforms/youth-water-and-peace>

<sup>47</sup> See International Water Association: <https://iwa-network.org/young-water-professionals/>

<sup>48</sup> See Water Youth Network: <https://www.wateryouthnetwork.org/>



Korea in 2015. On this global scale, the founder delivered a presentation as a young Sudanese person about water challenges in Sudan, focusing on women and the youth (Interview 34).

The founder established the national parliament of WYPW in Khartoum. The establishment did not require a legal and structured foundation. The WYPW is based on volunteerism where the reward for participation is found in the exposure, the experience and the connections that the youth gain due to participation in global events and through interacting with officials, donors and their peers. On the other side, the global youth networks rely heavily on the internet to connect with their nationally based groups and to grow their activities.

### 7.3.2 SDG 6 as an approach to the Nile

The declaration of the WYPW (2018) identified the role of young people in the water sector by referring to two spheres: nationally, through initiating and conducting tangible interventions in communities; and globally, by advocating ideas to high-level decision makers in international forums.

In Sudan, this activism is constrained to the provision of technical services and the organisation of campaigns at the community level, whereas integration with the water decision-making process has not yet been reached. The SYPW frames the Nile water problem through the lens of SDGs, and not as a transboundary resource challenge.

The team members resonated with this portrayal of their objectives according to SDG 6, and in accordance with general Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) purposes. Accordingly, they focus their activities on water for household usage (drinking water and sanitation), ultimately aiming to improve the livelihood of those at the grassroots level. However, the Nile question of water shares and dams is politically debated, and it is a sensitive topic not only because of the Nile negotiations but mainly because the natural resources in Sudan have caused conflict. What is more,

senior officials have monopolised the discussions over the Nile, and the opportunity of young people's engagement is therefore confined (Interview 25).<sup>49</sup>

Accommodating these reasons, the SYPW team designed their areas of work into education, awareness, field monitoring, communication and advocacy. For instance, they capitalised on their skills and knowledge to provide technical training for staff members who manage water stations, or philanthropic organisations that drill water wells. Additionally, they organise workshops for their peers in hydraulic engineering. Besides capacity building activities, they interact with grassroots organisations through arranging advocacy and awareness campaigns on water-related diseases, hygiene and sanitation (Interview 25).

Apparently, the SYPW activities employ the global discourse of investing youth capabilities and skills in development. Added to that, the members are volunteers and philanthropic values empower them with the feeling of being active citizens. Nevertheless, the pitfall of volunteerism is that young people are those who are seeking permanent jobs and wish to build a career, meaning that the turnover in the SYPW team has been high. Some team members have had to travel abroad to study, and others got full-time jobs, which reduced their time for voluntary work. Therefore, the SYPW struggles to conduct its activities on a continuous basis (Interview 25).

### 7.3.3 Linking to research centre, not the Government

As the Nile issues has been reconfigured as a local water resource challenge in the SYPW objective, the founder intentionally sought to link the new initiative to a research centre and not to the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources (MIWR), in pursuit of neutrality and independence. However, the revolution in 2018 has re-established a collaborative relationship between the SYPW and the Government.

Since the beginning, the founder situated the SYPW under the auspices of the Water Research Centre at Khartoum University. Becoming hosted by the research centre offered an appropriate

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<sup>49</sup> This interview was conducted in April 2018, that is, before the December Revolution in 2018.

space to interlink the activities of a newly established youth initiative, mainly because prominent professors in hydrology, including the director of the Centre, were staunch supporters of the idea of youth engagement; additionally, the founder was working in the Centre (Interview 34). Importantly, she wanted to start the initiative as an independent entity and wished for it not to be affiliated to the Government or other research centres, although some of the officials attempted to include this youth activity under the Ministry. The founder instead promoted being affiliated to the well-known research centre (Interview 34). This clear intention of the founder was different from that of the Eg-YPW, which is attached to the Government, as explained in chapter five above.

Accordingly, the research setting enabled the founder to have an office and to send out a call for volunteers among the young researchers who were connected to the Water Research Centre. In reality, the team members volunteered in organising the events of the Centre. As a reward, the Centre could vouch for their activities and recommended them to the potential partners. For example, the SYPW team assisted in organising one of the Centre's conferences in which the Sudanese MIWR took part. As a reward for their organisational efforts in the conference, the MIWR agreed to supporting them with vehicles and granted permission for them to conduct fieldwork (testing water quality) in a remote area (Interview 25).

Despite such logistical interaction with the Government, the founder deliberately neutralized the relation with the Government or, more precisely, with the Al-Bashir regime. In the beginning, the founder sent an official letter and met with an official in the Ministry as to inform them about this new entity, because she did not want the Government to obstruct the activities and to question them. Particularly 'the initiative faced some problems from the previous government [Al-Bashir government] where they stopped some of their activities and refused to give them permission' (Interview 34). There was a strong possibility the Government accused this young team of getting foreign support, which violated the law.

After the revolution, when the civic activism had been illuminated, some of the team members participated in public discussions led by the political entity 'Forces of Freedom and Change (FCC)'. The discussion was about assessing water resources and needs in the transitional period (Sudan Youth Parliament for Water [SYPW], 2019). The SYPW participation reveals the shift in the

relationship with political entities from impartiality to active engagement. This revolutionary spirit is addressed in the following words by the SYPW founder:

'In general, we think that the revolution affected us in a positive way, we have been officially recognized as an important key stakeholder in the water sector in Sudan, this gives the hope for youth in Sudan that they can do a lot.' (Interview 34)

In this quote the founder demonstrates the positive impacts of the revolution on their activities. The number of active members rapidly increased from 300 to 1700 members, spread across villages and cities, while previously they were a small group associated with the university in the field of hydrology. Furthermore, the team is planning to have focal points on the state level and to create a partnership with different stakeholders, unlike before when they were still a low-profile organisation (Interview 34).

Importantly, the relation with the Ministry has been palpably re-established. A group of the SYPW held a meeting with the Minister, introducing the objectives, activities and challenges they have been facing as volunteering youngsters in the water sector. As a response, they got promising support from the Minister (SYPW, 2020). Promisingly, this interaction with the Government was emphasised at the Nile Day celebration in February 2020. The founder explained: 'we [have] been invited to organise the Nile Day in Sudan which is the first time in the history of the Ministry to invite youth initiative to organise this kind of event' (Interview 34). Indeed, after the revolution, the founder capitalised on the participation of Government rather than reconfiguring the Nile as a transboundary resource challenge. Building ties with the top decision makers in the water sector facilitates their movement across states and villages, conducting SDG 6 and WASH activities.

#### 7.3.4 Disconnected in the Nile and connected locally

The WYPW addresses the transboundary water challenge under the articulation of peace and conflict, where youth engagement contributes to attaining 'sustainable peace'. This purpose relies on knowledge and a scientific mode of activism, as well as investing in the youth's educational capabilities (WYPW, 2018).

However, the Nile River issue is not visible as a basin region challenge in the activity of the WYPW. The map of national parliaments on the WYPW website shows only the Egyptian and Sudanese parliaments in the Nile region. The premise of WYPW activities can explain this small number in terms of youth volunteerism; it does not constitute a structured global youth movement.

Despite the low representation of WYPW in the Eastern Nile Basin, which experiences a significant contestation over water, there is no interaction between the Egyptian and Sudanese parliaments. This reflects how the WYPW underpins vertical connections: from the global to the national level rather than boosting regional ties. For instance, the session of Eg-YPW at the World Youth Forum in Egypt, covered in chapter five, was attended by the global board members who delivered speeches addressing the value of 'blue peace' (Whitebrook, 2019) although peers from the region were not involved. Moreover, the Sudanese interviewee stated there has been a proposal to formulate the 'Nile edition' of the WYPW, but it has not been decided yet to set this up (Interview 34). This mode of ties settles the global board of WYPW as a broker node that national parliaments have to communicate with first.

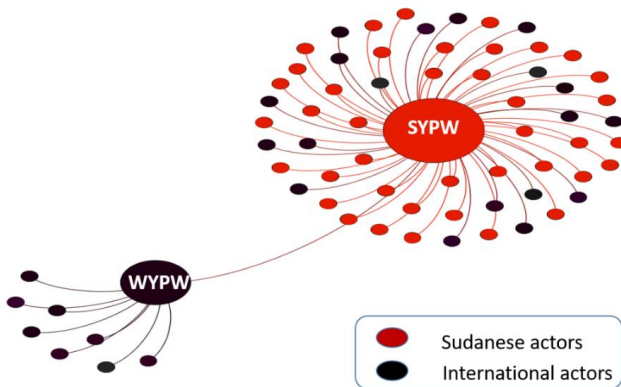
In contrast to the regional disconnection, the building of connections with donors has been striving to consolidate the new youth entity without depending on governmental funds. On the national scale, acquiring financial support from donors implies gaining of independence from the political regime. The founder stated that when she introduced the SWYP to the other national entities, especially the governmental one, by sending a brief of the entity, she deliberately did not ask them for funds; it was crucial for her to promote the mandate of youth engagement in the water sector. She argued that if she had asked for funds, that would have meant a termination of the entity before it had even started, because donors could perceive this as young people seeking personal gains. Therefore, she took one year promoting the idea among the interested organisations, before conducting the first activity (Interview 34).

To be compatible with the scope of youth engagement at the local level and to overcome the shortage of funding, the founder of the SYPW co-established another organisation, 'Young Water Solution', with 16 other international young people in 2015, to be based in Brussels. It aims at

building the capacity of young people to write funding proposals and to network them with donor agencies (Interview 34). So, the foreign fund is an adequate alternative to maintain independency and to finance activities.

Practically, the SYPW has been deploying its activities at the local level in different federal states; particularly after the revolution in 2018. Employing the 'ego network setting' in the Gephi program, I filtered the SYPW network out from the entire network. Figure 7.2 below depicts the ties with local and international entities inside Sudan, and the linkages with WYPW.

Figure 7.2 The SYPW network



Source: own graphical representation produced by Gephi software. It is based on data collected from interviews and internet resources of civil society organisations, initiatives and research entities. The node size of SYPW and WYPW has been changed for illustrative purposes.

The majority of entities are inside Sudan (red nodes), including local/grassroots CSOs, student clubs in universities, and research centres in universities. The SYPW has been collaborating with them to conduct awareness sessions and workshops, and building on these small activities, the SYPW can maintain access to the organisation or local community.

Moreover, inside Sudan, the SYPW has been interacting with the national offices of international organisations (black nodes) including UN agencies (e.g. UNDP, WHO) and donor agencies (e.g.

USAID, Drought Mitigation Program of IGAD). The interactions have been based on participation in consultation meetings and co-organising workshops that target young people. In other words, the youth factor in SYPW has enhanced its position as a representative youth entity in the field of water management; therefore, international agencies have approached them for collaboration.

Besides the connections with international actors inside Sudan, the WYPW is a gate to interact with other global entities. The connections with these global organisations have facilitated the flow of knowledge and innovation. For instance, the SYPW members have participated in global competitions of innovating water solutions

To conclude, although SYPW epitomizes a global organisation, a wide-basin vision is not demonstrated in their activities, the relationships with peer Nile-based organisations are absent. Therefore, the Nile is reconfigured as a public water service issue where highly educated youth can improve it by investing their knowledge, capabilities and volunteerism.

#### 7.4 Contested national politics: Ethiopian diaspora groups

The Ethiopian diaspora groups have been playing a significant role in Eastern Nile politics due to the GERD contestation. Their engagement has not taken a permanent position but instead, their behaviour has become entangled with the contextual national politics. Thus, their transnational network is distinct from the other explained cases in this chapter.

##### 7.4.1 Opposing political regimes

Diaspora groups' capability is found in them sharing their knowledge and the skills they gained outside the country for their home needs. Politically, they can play an advocacy role from two different opposite directions: they can promote the policies of their regime or they can invest their capacities in the countries to take a position against the regime of their original country (Brinkerhoff, 2012).

The voice of opposition Ethiopian diaspora groups started rising after 2005. Lyons (2007) explained that the consequences of the 2005 election<sup>50</sup> have reignited the engagement of the diaspora in politics. Closing the public sphere in Ethiopia gave space for diaspora activism, and some opposition leaders fled out of the country and then were able to lead the opposition from abroad. They employed different strategies for lobbying and communicating with American members of Congress and European institutions against human rights violations by the regime. They utilised internet facilities and established their websites, blogs, radio stations and mailing lists to harmonize their activism and convey their stance against the political regime.

The GERD was evoked in the political contestation, and diaspora groups mobilised it for their political interests. Opposition ethnic groups contested the development claims of the Zenawi regime (1995-2012), that he was able to attain national development by his leadership of the EBRDF coalition and to maintain consensus among political leaders and society. In the development vision, the agricultural sector was the backbone of the economy, but this vision stimulated action by the opposition groups, because it was not built on equal distribution of resources. Moreover, the Tigray region benefited more from the outcomes of developmental projects compared to other regions. Additionally, land distribution was in favour of investors' interests which however deteriorated the conditions of small farmers (Plaut, 2012).

The GERD has not been the first hydraulic project to cause conflict with the regime. Diaspora groups have engaged in resisting the construction of the Gibe III dam<sup>51</sup>, and they utilised their capabilities in advocacy and lobbying, besides communication facilities, to challenge the regime's national project (Abbink, 2012).

However, the GERD has given rise to historical, economic and social grievances. At the Nile Basin level, the historical Nile treaties and the Egyptian opposition to the CFA disguised the Ethiopian

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<sup>50</sup> The 2005 election included significant participation of opposition parties unlike in the framework of the previous elections (1995 and 2000). The results were contested and ended with arresting opposition and wide violence, detention and human rights violations. On this see: Abbink (2006).

<sup>51</sup> It is a big dam located in the Omo River. It operated in 2015 to generate electricity. However, it deteriorated the livelihood of farmers, surrounding ecology of Lake Turkana that is shared with Kenya. The Government used violence against local people who opposed the Dam. On this see: Carr (2017) and Hailu (2018).



rights to the Nile waters. Economically, food insecurity due to famine cycles and high poverty rates has driven the Government to invest in the agricultural sector. In addition, generating hydropower is essential to overcome electricity blackouts. These layers of grievances fed the social one as the Nile is perceived as a 'source of national shame': the people have not benefited from the river resources and the GERD would redeem this prolonged suffering (Hafez, 2019). Therefore, the GERD has been framed and endorsed by Zenawi and the succeeding political regimes as a symbol of national unity. Despite that, however, it still has been ethnicised in the framework of diaspora groups' activism.

#### 7.4.2 Divergent capabilities

In Nile politics, the Ethiopian diaspora groups have employed the capabilities and facilities they have in their international contexts to endorse their opposing or supportive positions towards the political regime.

An example of a confrontational relationship between the opposition and the Ethiopian regime can be discerned through the activism of some Oromo groups based in Cairo. In 2014 and 2016, these groups held 'Oromia Celebration Day' in Cairo and three obscure Egyptian activists participated in this day. They founded the 'African Parliament Initiative' that aimed to support peoples' rights across the African nations. These Egyptian activists appeared in a video showing the Oromo flag and chanting with words supporting Oromo rights in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the GERD was mentioned in the celebration by referring to Oromia support of the Egyptian historical rights in the Nile waters. The 2016 celebration was under the spotlight, unlike the 2014 one, because it took place while Oromia and Amhara were engaging in uprisings in Ethiopia against the ruling regime. That is why the Ethiopian Government used this incident to accuse Egypt of intervention in its internal affairs (ElShahawy, 2016; Amer, 2014).

While in Europe, the informant demonstrated that the construction of dams by the Tigray Government had not been for all interested Ethiopian people. The informant said that 'the purpose of these dams is manipulation, they told people, if we built this dam, Ethiopia would be number

one in development, but the money is going in their pockets' (Interview 2). Furthermore, the respondent distrusted the Government's argument of the regional benefits of the GERD:

'what the Government actually did instead of giving electricity for all Ethiopians, they are exporting it to Djibouti. How that is possible to export electricity while your people are dying!' (Interview 2)

Besides these opposition groups, there were diaspora support groups of the GERD and the Government policies. These groups have built their advocacy to the GERD on the basis of their higher education and professional capabilities. This knowledge capability is framed in the title of an online platform known as the 'Ethiopian International Professional Support for Abay (EIPSA)'. It is a network of scientists in the diaspora who are well-educated and prominent scholars in different fields. Their rationale is based on the Ethiopian rights in the Nile and developing water resources, including the GERD construction. One of the formerly engaged scholars in this network explained why they constituted this group:

'This is civil society, by Ethiopians who are supportive of the Dam and they were worried about news reports especially the Egyptian news ... in a negative way according to them. But these guys [members of EIPSA] are reading everything between the lines, trying to support as much as protecting the project construction.' (Interview 35)

In respect of this purpose, the network aimed to produce and share accurate information about the Dam in the downstream countries and simultaneously to produce technical studies and share with the Government (EIPSA, n.d.).<sup>52</sup>

These two examples of supporting or opposing the dam revealed the civic public when educated diaspora groups organised themselves to convey information about the dam in order to counter the position of the Egyptian media. In contrast, the Oromo groups capitalised on their primordial

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<sup>52</sup> The Nile Club is another example of the intellectual- based organisation. It was established as a response to the increasing contestation over GERD in February 2020. The Organisation has similar aim to the EIPSA which is to 'dispel misinformation' about the impacts of Dam on Egypt. On this see its website: <http://thenileclub.com/>

connections and organised ethnic-based gatherings and festivals with an attempt to lobby with the Egyptian activists to oppose the political regime, namely the Tigray dominance of the government.

#### 7.4.3 Government mobilisation

The Ethiopian Government considered the financial capability (remittances) of the diaspora in the framework of depending on national funds, not the international donor countries and institutions, to construct the dam. Therefore, the Zenawi Government established the Office of National Council for the Coordination of Popular Participation on the Construction of the GERD to mobilise peoples locally and abroad, as explained in chapter five.

Additionally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided facilities to encourage the diaspora to transform their contributions. For instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a document containing basic information for diaspora groups and it included a special section for the GERD. It demonstrated how to purchase bonds with all details of bond rates, ways of money transformation and the role of embassies overseas. It is worth mentioning here that the document affirmed that only those of Ethiopian origin have the right to purchase, and it is not open for foreigners (Diaspora Engagement Affairs General Directorate, 2011). This emphasis indicates how the political regime advocates the GERD as an essential component of Ethiopian nationalism.

The result of government mobilization is depicted in table 7.1 below, which demonstrates official numbers of diaspora contributions to the GERD construction in 2016.

Table 7.1 Ethiopian diaspora contribution to the GERD (Purchase of Bonds)

Rank	Global Regions	Bond Purchase (US\$)	Diaspora Population (estimated)
1	Middle East	13,310,145	850,000
2	North America	6,896,284	650,000
3	Africa	6,488,622	450,000
4	Europe	6,107,087	550,000
5	Asia	884,004	100,000

Source: adapted from Makonnen (2016:3)

This table reveals higher contributions from the diaspora in the Middle East, the neighbouring region to the Nile Basin, compared to Europe and North America. One explanation is that, for example, the fundraising campaign in the United States of America was challenged by selling bonds without a legal claim from the American authorities. Additionally, some opposition diaspora groups disturbed the campaigns, questioning the rationale of constructing a dam compared to other development needs (Abteu and Dessu, 2019).

Comparable to this explanation, a European-based interviewee demonstrated the absence of participation in the governmental campaigns concerning the dam:

'I do not believe in this Department [the Diaspora Engagement Affairs Directorate General] in the Government, they only need diaspora money, and to buy lands to make foreign currency, they do not want soft capital like knowledge. Nowadays, the contribution of the diaspora is more than Government exporting ... So we pay for the country but we do not have a voice, they do not want our political opinion... If you need diaspora you should engage them in all aspects of the country... Me I have the nationality of another country, but still I have the identity of my country and have a strong feeling.' (Interview 31)

By comparison, one respondent who is a scholar explained the motivation of the Middle East diaspora, unlike that of the West:

'They [diaspora] were very much longing for the country and many of them are in the Arab countries and the Middle East in temporary bases and then they want to always to go back to Ethiopia... It is not only contributing for the Dam, but they are investing in Ethiopian relatives and small business, they are active to send back more money compared to those in Europe...Then it is easy for diaspora community members in the Middle East to mobilise people that the Dam is your interest in the place you can go back to, the places where poverty reigns, so it is much better to respect your country.' (Interview 35)

The differences between these two understandings provided another layer of how the position of diaspora groups varied due to their relation with the political regime and the strength of connections to home countries.

#### 7.4.4 Continuity of confrontation after 2018

The example of Oromo group activism in Cairo was targeted against Tigray Government autocracy, but in 2018, the Oromo politician Abiy Ahmed seized the top of the EPRDF coalition. Nevertheless, the shift of power led to raising of the Amhara opposition. During the fieldwork in Bahir Dar, the capital of the Amhara region, I encountered this ongoing sentiment from different informants, while discussing their activism in the 'Save Lake Tana Campaign'. They affirmed that Lake Tana is the source of the Nile, not the GERD, and that the Government is applying its efforts towards Dam construction and negating the water hyacinth problem in the Lake. So, the Dam has been ethnicized in the framework of the political confrontation.

Opposite to this voice, there is a narrative that refutes this confrontation in pursuit of national development and underestimates the role of ethnic disagreement on the GERD issue. The respective interviewee stated:

'The dam within Ethiopia is widely supported. Only a few people, not very vocally, went against the Dam, stating it is politically not developmentally oriented ... Those people who did not like the Government of the time to put up such a project and to convince the people made political capital out of it, so they formed an opposite pact. But they did not put it openly because the public would not accept it... Mostly their position was similar or close to the position of to the Government of Egypt and opposition segments in Sudan... Putting them in a

very delicate [position] about with whom you are working, against the country or a political party? ... So really, there is no NGO or public association that can work forward to network against the Dam.' (Interview 35)

In line with the articulation of nationalism, diaspora groups in the USA demonstrated to support the Government position in the 2020 negotiations<sup>53</sup> that were sponsored by the American Government. Diaspora groups accused the American Government of not being a neutral international observer, but rather supporting the Egyptian side against the Ethiopian one. During the negotiation sessions in Washington, some of the Ethiopians protested against the American role and position on the GERD issue (Capital Ethiopia, 2020). Additionally, Ethiopian professionals created an online petition arguing that Egypt should decline the reallocation of water shares as Ethiopia and upstream countries have demanded (Negash, 2019). Both actions of demonstrations and petitions are readily available activism tools for Western countries.

To conclude, ethnic contestation has overshadowed the national development of a giant Dam. Both the supporting and the opposition groups have benefited from the capabilities and facilities provided by their diaspora groups. However, because it departs from internal politics, the network is based on ethnicity or nationality. In other words, the driver of diaspora engagement is grievance either against Egypt or against the ruling ethnicity, which is why they did not build ties with other Nile peoples or establish any format of civic initiative that transcended Ethiopian internal politics.

## 7.5 Knowledge cooperation: the Nile Basin Capacity Building Network (NBCBN)

The Nile Basin Capacity Building Network (NBCBN) is a research-based organisation established in 2000 aiming to build research networks of researchers and universities across the Nile Basin countries. The underlying assumption is that trust building can be attained by networking researchers and the sharing of information.

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<sup>53</sup> The Egyptian Government asked the Trump administration and the WB to observe the negotiations on filling and operating the Dam after they had stalled several times. The round started in November 2019, but was suspended again in February 2020 due to the Ethiopian refusal to sign the initial agreement.

Despite the regional vision of Nile cooperation, the NBCBN has been struggling to balance independence and sustaining joint knowledge cooperation among researchers. In that respect, the objectives and activities of its network have been reconfigured to maintain the network's operation.

#### 7.5.1 Creating epistemic community

The Nile is configured as a natural resource that requires science to regulate its flow, exploit its benefits and to manage uncertain environmental impacts affecting it. Given that, scientists play a prevalent role in Nile politics. Therefore, connecting scientists across the Nile Basin was presumed to be a potentially suitable approach to obtain regional cooperation, as explained in chapter six.

Departing from this anticipation, the NBCBN was formulated to create an epistemic community in the Nile Basin where scientists can share their methodologies and knowledge, and collectively provide decision makers with adequate measures regarding Nile policies.

To build up the network, the NBCBN started with Nile Basin researchers who participated in technical hydraulic courses provided by the Hydraulics Research Institute affiliated to the Egyptian MWRI. The respective informant stated that:

'We decided to continue as a network because we have a role in the basin, we contributed to building capacity of researchers in research and training and the countries need capacity building all the time, it is not a process to end up.'  
(Interview 10)

The NBCBN aimed to invest in the relationships that were built up among researchers during training courses through the establishment of joint scientific projects. The membership of the network mainly comprised individual researchers who have a hydraulic-related education, in spite of their affiliation to government, think tanks, the private sector or CSOs. The respective informant mentioned that they have around 500 individuals who have completed the membership form, although not all of them are active members (Interview 10).

This large number of researchers are organised in focal nodes hosted by universities or research centres in the riparian countries. According to the NBCBN website (2020), there are nine official nodes in Burundi, D.R. Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. Being a focal point of the NBCBN allows a research centre or university to join research projects and facilitate interactions on the national level, for example, through assisting researchers from the other universities in the network to access scientific resources or to come into contact with targeted communities (Interview 10).

After launching the NBCBN, the affiliated researchers identified six water challenges in the Nile Basin which became the foundation of respective research clusters. The national focal node that has scientific excellence in the topic became the leading actor in the cluster. For instance, the Ethiopian group led the research on river structures including dams, while the Egyptian research group focused on the geographic information system (GIS) and modelling tool in water resources (Interview 10).

The respective interviewee claimed that the network had a positive impact on the career advancement of researchers who took part in research projects or training courses conducted by the network. The influence is revealed when the researchers occupy executive positions, e.g. a member of the network who was appointed as Minister of the environment in a riparian country, or members who gained positions in NBI projects.

Ultimately, the NBCBN connects specialized researchers and scientists through conducting joint projects where they share their knowledge, and through co-learning. Furthermore, the NBCBN is connected with decision makers, either through the focal points in the riparian countries or at a regional level with the NBI.

#### 7.5.2 Seeking funds and Nile Basin ownership

The underlying assumption of endorsing scientists' engagement is to provide non-biased knowledge for developing the Nile Basin. However, the independence of the NBCBN has been



challenged in the framework of Nile politics. The confrontation over the Nile water shares between Egypt and the upstream countries was highlighted when the NBCBN outlined its independence, with politics stating that Egypt is the host country of the NBCBN which can provoke an Egyptian hydro-hegemony. However, the respective informant has sought to confer ownership of the network to the entire Nile Basin. Despite the emphasis on independence compared to national entitlement, the NBCBN's operation and activities rely on donors' disbursements. In other words, national independence has been a persistent concern rather than donor dependence.

The hydraulic training that formed the basis of the network was funded by the Dutch Government through a UNESCO-IHE project under the objective of capacity building and knowledge exchange for Nile Basin cooperation. The Dutch donor, accordingly, has retained logistical and financial support of the newly established NBCBN in 2000. The fund has contributed to boosting network activities: creating focal points and mobilizing researchers for joint projects (NBCBN, 2020).

Although the Dutch fund continued,<sup>54</sup> its disbursements have decreased. The interviewee attributed this reduction to two factors: one was related to the global economic crisis that led to shrinking financial aid and the second factor was institutional restructuring inside the Dutch Foreign Affairs Ministry, as the water department changed to environment and energy, implying that water became just one component of a broader departmental range. Lack of funds affected regional cooperation, as the respective informant explained:

'As long as I [NBCBN] do not have funds, I cannot gather people. I used to do 5-10 trainings before or conduct 35 projects at the same time. For two years now, I did not have research projects because of the lack of funds.' (Interview 10, own translation)

Due to the limited funds, the Nile Basin vision of the network was reconfigured to engage in national/local research projects. The respective informant explained that the network was open and

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<sup>54</sup> The Dutch Government, through the UNESCO-IHE, is the main international donor to the NBCBN. The support has been provided since the initial phase, from 2000 to 2005; then from 2006 to 2010 under the project of 'Knowledge Networks for the Nile Basin'. The Dutch fund continues to support the transitional phase of the NBCBN to be an independent entity under the project 'Institutional Strengthening', from January 2016 to December 2020(NBCBN,2020; Technopolis Group, 2018:102-103).

supports national-based research projects, which can be proposed by a member in the network to investigate a local water problem and has acquired funding from the national government. For example, researchers in Sudan applied for funding for a water quality project in Khartoum and obtained it from the Government and FAO at the national and not the Nile Basin level. Similarly, through individual researchers at a national level, connections were created with the Lake Victoria Basin: They jointly applied for funding to cover the second phase of research that used to be supported through the NBCBN (Interview 10). In the meantime, at the regional level, the activities were not of a significantly high level for long-term research projects; instead, training courses became the main activity of the network (Interview 10).

Like in the case of DFID funding of the NBD, generous donor funding is crucial to the success of joint activities, in order to cover costs of transboundary activities. It is evident that the NBCBN has been operating based on donor funding. To compensate for the loss of Dutch funding, the network has applied for research grants and built connections with other research centres, as is shown in the next section.

In comparison to this dependency relation with regard to external funds, the seeking of regional ownership of the network has been a critical issue. The respective informant stressed the dilemma of independence from the riparian governments:

'It is impossible that a country owns the network. When we worked in Egypt, we worked equally with all countries with openness and transparency. Accordingly, it is impossible to say Egypt or Uganda owns the network. The ownership is for all countries, and it is crucial that the hosting country, its regulation, allows to work in equality not only regarding water equity but also equality to learn, to conduct research to gain knowledge. It is impossible that one country owns the network.' (Interview 10, own translation)

This sentiment reveals how the burden of Egyptian hegemony lies underneath regional cooperation, and consequently the NBCBN informant averted this vision assertively. According to the hydro-hegemony discourse, Egypt entails 'expert power' besides other materialistic power dimensions. The Egyptian scientists and experts possess the technical capabilities that enable them

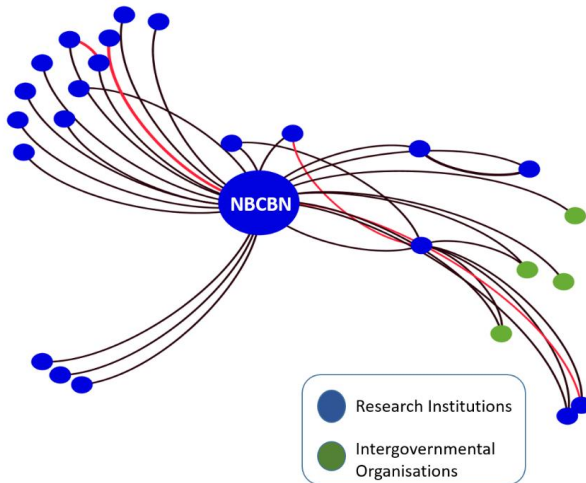
to criticize hydraulic projects in the other riparian countries, such as the GERD, utilizing scientific evidence (Khennache et al., 2017:140). The NBCBN, however, aims to refute the assumption of hegemony by awarding ownership of the network to the whole basin.

In fact, the NBCBN initiated research activities that were coordinated by the Hydraulics Research Institute of Egypt since 1996 and it then became the regional hub of joint research projects. Therefore, it was expected that the steering committee of the NBCBN would decide to keep Egypt being the host country of the network (Interview 10). However, it has disassociated from the Hydraulics Research Institute and became a legally independent organisation in 2018 (NBCBN, 2020). Hence, the optimal objective of the NBCBN is to maintain its credibility by producing non-biased knowledge.

### 7.5.3 The Basin-wide network

As mentioned before, the essence of the network is to connect researchers across the Nile Basin. Therefore, Nile-based universities are depicted in the SNA produced by network analysis below. However, to conduct joint projects, global research centres and think tanks also occupy significant positions in the network. As shown in figure 7.3, the NBCBN plays the role of network-making within the Nile Basin, by building ties with research entities in the Nile Basin and connecting them with international research funds. By filtering the NBCBN network from the entire network of the Eastern Nile Basin, it is shown that research institutions (blue nodes) are the prevailing actors. Additionally, intergovernmental organizations, namely the NBI, ENTRO, NELSAP, and the Nile Technical Advisory Committee (Nile-TAC), have direct connections with the NBCBN. The interactions with research institutions (black lines), either the universities in the Nile Basin countries or hydraulic research centres outside the Nile Basin region, are based on knowledge sharing by conducting joint research projects. However, some of these connections entailed funding and organisational ties (red lines): the UNESCO-IHE has been providing financial and research support, with the Hydraulics Research Institute in Egypt having been the host organisation.

Figure 7.3 The NBCBN network



Source: own graphical representation produced by Gephi software. It is based on data collected from interviews and internet resources of civil society organisations, initiatives and research entities. The node size of NBCBN has been changed for illustrative purposes.

Besides networking, the role of focal point institutions in the Nile Basin countries is to facilitate communication and the work of researchers who can communicate with governmental organisations to acquire data; however, the NBCBN does not function to communicate directly with governments to get data like the NBI does which has legal foundations to do so. The network, by comparison, can support efforts with letters and through acknowledgements only. This division of roles between the country nodes and the regional one (i.e. the NBCBN) reveals the concern of independence from national governments. The respective informant framed it in the sense that the objective of the NBCBN is to 'generate knowledge, not to collect knowledge' (Interview 10).

Joining an international network is another tool to keep informed of new research grants and to build up connections with peer research centres in the water sector. The NBCBN is part of Cap-Net UNDP, a global network that has a regional network focused on the Nile called the IWRM

Capacity Building Network for the Nile Basin (Nile IWRM Net), hosted by Sudan (NBCBN, 2020).

The NBCBN approaches the Nile interaction from the hydraulic science lens, which takes the ecological uncertainty of the Nile into consideration. However, the network has slightly broadened its spectrum of activities and started engaging in non-technical research projects and programs. This has happened mainly through a project on capacity building of scientists for public communication, in addition to the hosting of a workshop about youth capacity building in water diplomacy (Goubert et al., 2019). Still, these activities underline capacity building, which is within the scope of NBCBN activism in the Nile.

#### 7.5.4 The challenge of Nile cooperation

The ultimate objective of the NBCBN is to be a regional entity within the epistemic community of the Nile Basin and to produce impartial scientific knowledge. However, Nile politics, mainly the relationship with the NBI and GERD contestation, have affected the regional orientation.

Regarding the relation with the NBI, both the NBCBN and the NBI employ scientific-based activities. Therefore, there is a competitive relationship in terms of getting funds and conducting transnational research projects or courses. However, the NBI has the advantage of being an intergovernmental organisation, hence its appeal to scientists and researchers. Therefore, the respective informant described the NBCBN as a 'tiny network' compared to the NBI and other regional organisations in the Nile Basin, such as the LVBC (Interview 10).

Nevertheless, the history and mandate of the NBCBN encourages cooperation with the NBI as both are working in the same region and the Nile researchers interact with both organisations. Accordingly, the NBCBN has an MoU with the NBI for sharing data and research activities, as was particularly the case during the implementation of the SVP (2003-2009). However, the outcome has been a 'very neutral' cooperation, according to the informant, because the two entities collaborated at a minimum level, such as sharing the costs of trainees, but not developing a basin-

wide research project (Interview 10). Despite that, the NBCBN has included in its transnational aims the objective of 'strengthen[ing] linkage with the NBI and other relevant regional/international/national institutions (Partnership)' (NBCBN, 2020).

Apart from hurdles to organisational relations, another challenge emerged after Egypt revoked its full participation in the NBI's activities in 2010. As a result, individual researchers cannot take part in research projects sponsored by the NBI because of the political position of the state. Egypt's suspension of its membership in the regional level disconnects researchers from the regional technical and knowledge exchange. Driven by the epistemic mission, the informant asserted that Egyptians also have 'technical rights'. The political position has negatively affected the Egyptian researchers in the experience and knowledge that they could gain if they were involved in the NBI regional projects (Interview 10).

The second challenge for the regional scope that the NBCBN has encountered concerns the dilemma of the GERD. Mainly, the giant dam contests the objective of non-biased knowledge as urged by the NBCBN. The informant observed that the GERD has negatively influenced cooperation with Ethiopian researchers and entities, e.g. data sharing became problematic. Additionally, the researchers adopted the state's vision in scientific debates. Before the GERD, there was joint research between the Ethiopian and Egyptian researchers on the impact of climate change on water infrastructures. After the GERD, however, the Ethiopian researchers 'politicised' Nile cooperation and that contradicts the mission of the NBCBN (Interview 10). Concerning the politicisation of scientific cooperation, the respondent affirmed that the NBCBN cannot engage in a research project about the GERD as long as there is no validated scientific data. Any research conducted would be interpreted as biased because of the absence of data, and this would lead to a situation where regional cooperation is thwarted (Interview 10).

To sum up, the NBCBN epitomised the global discourse and the regional vision that science is the impetus of regional cooperation. However, generating impartial knowledge without national considerations has impeded the building of a regional epistemic community.

## 7.6 Preliminary conclusion

The cases discussed reveal how the Nile issue is approached from different angles, including aspects such as the environment, sustainability, service provision, science and national development. According to these approaches, the actors have configured the Nile River relationships either as focused on one basin (NBCBN and Eg-NDF) or as a watercourse that runs within a sovereign territory (Ethiopian Diaspora and SYPW).

Therefore, the focus across levels is not comparable in these cases. Both the NBCBN and the Eg-NDF emphasise the regional scale in their mission and activities; furthermore, they frame the issues as intertwined with the global scale, by adopting a global discourse and receiving funding on the global level. By comparison, the national/local level is the sphere of the Ethiopian diaspora and the SYPW, and they are less connected with the global level.

Except for the Ethiopian case, the three organisations were founded on the basis of external support from donors, and they have linked their activism through the availability of financial resources. Therefore, they have built their networks with global actors and strengthened it by contextualizing global discourses of sustainability (i.e. focused on the SDGs) or scientific knowledge. Thus, their networks are not autonomous, but are formulated mostly around a single issue, either ‘development’ or ‘the environment’. In contrast to this, the engagement of the Ethiopian diaspora is autonomous, because it is built on primordial connections and has evolved around one event rather than a specific issue.

The relationship with government has deliberately been considered in the spectrum of partnership with governmental entities (Eg-NDF and SYPW after the revolution), to support their local activities. In the case of the NBCBN, Nile Basin ownership was flagged. Accordingly, the activism of these three cases does not contest state policy in Nile politics. While the Ethiopian diaspora case defines the relationship with the government according to ethnic politics, it is hence situated between contestation and advocacy to the regime’s policy.

Establishing transnational ties with regional entities is significant in both cases - the Eg-NDF and the NBCBN - because the regional connection is an asset of their power within the Nile network. Therefore, they have invested in joining or applying for funds that connect them with other actors. In contrast to this, the SYPW and Ethiopian diaspora activism is bounded by national or locally based actors with almost no ties within the Nile Basin. This difference is because of variation in the Nile configuration. Additionally, the organisational structure of the Eg-NDF and the NBCBN facilitates their movement within the entire Nile Basin network, while the Sudanese case is still in the initiation phase, and the Ethiopian case does not represent a permanently inclusive group.

The divergence and convergence between the cases in this chapter elucidate why the overall structure of the Eastern Nile Basin is clustered. Moreover, the positions of different types of donor agencies in the Eastern Nile Basin network vary significantly.