

THE AFRICAN UNION'S RESPONSE TO WATER CONFLICTS IN THE NILE RIVER

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INTRODUCTION

- By the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the realm of International Relations (IR) has been characterised by resource geopolitics

“the potential of conflict as a result of the scarcity of vital resources that cross political boundaries” (Diehl, 1991:11)

- The World is confronted with the challenge of resource scarcity, because valuable resources exist in relatively small amounts. And resource scarcity eventually leads to environmental conflicts

“traditional conflicts induced by an environmental degradation and they often manifest themselves as conflicts over resources” (Libiszewski, 1992:14)

- With ethnic and ideological tensions that would witness interstate conflicts, the competition for access to vital resources has become one of the drivers for conflict in IR.
- Resource-based conflicts have become a major concern to international peace and security when we expand the concept of “security” to include “environmental security”.

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- ❑ This realm of IR is experiencing a new landscape of global conflict as far as resources are concerned.
- ❑ The scarcity of water has contributed to the intensity of the competition over resources
- ❑ At the heart of global environmental politics lies the issue of “water wars” which has become part of the political rhetoric
 - “a war caused by the desire for access to water, in which the scarcity of water determines the means to go to war”*
(Turton, 2000:36) .
- ❑ The term itself refers to conflict between countries, states, or groups over access to water resources, and such conflicts come as a result of opposing interests of water users, public or private” .

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- ❑ Despite contending beliefs regarding the occurrence of water wars, current river water shortages, the fierce competition of shared rivers and the uneven distribution of international shared rivers constitute conditions for water conflicts
- ❑ As unlikely as it seems for water to be the source of conflict, however, it bears many similarities to oil.
- ❑ **FIRSTLY**, It is essential for a wide range of human activities, and **SECONDLY** it also exists in relatively small amounts
- ❑ Therefore, any threat pertaining to access to water may lead to people and or countries preserving and even fighting for water
- ❑ And this should be viewed in a context where water is shared by two or more actors
- ❑ Shared water resources constitute a source of conflict if the river is shared “across” rather than “along” a border.

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- ❑ The Nile River Basin (NRB) plays a central role in the conflict over water.
- ❑ The Nile is an international river as it is shared amongst eleven riparian countries

UPSTREAM COUNTRIES	DOWNSTREAM COUNTRIES
Burundi	Sudan
Eritrea	Egypt
Ethiopia	
Kenya	
Rwanda	
Tanzania	
Uganda, the DRC and South Sudan	

HOMER-DIXON'S ENVIRONMENTAL SCARCITY THEORY

- Environmental Scarcity

“the declining availability of renewable natural resources such as freshwater or soil” (Bingham, 2001).

- The environmental scarcity theory illustrates how scarcity of renewable resources can contribute to social breakdown and violence. It does this by providing environment-conflict linkages

- Hypothesis

- *“resource scarcity, through the three causal forms of scarcity (i.e. **demand-induced**, **supply-induced**, and **structural-induced scarcity**), have the potential to cause conflict”.*

- The concept "environmental scarcity" encompasses all these three sources.

- What is unfortunate about most analysts is that they often study demand and supply scarcity in isolation from structural-induced scarcity.

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- ▣ **NB:** Demand, supply and structural-induced scarcity are not mutually exclusive; they often occur simultaneously and interact with one another
- ▣ However, the environmental scarcity theory allows these three distinct sources of scarcity to be incorporated into one analysis.
- ▣ Hence I argue that an analysis of the Nile disputes should not be made only on the basis of the uneven distribution, but concurrently with water demand and supply

1. Demand-Induced Scarcity

- ❑ Demand-induced scarcity is primarily caused by population growth
- ❑ An increase in demand assumes that the growth in population divides the pie into smaller slices for each individual, group or state. Demand-induced scarcities arise only with resources that are “rivalrous” (e.g. water).
- ❑ A resource is deemed to be rivalrous when its use by one economic actor reduces its availability for others and this may lead to increased intergroup competition, and under unfavourable economic and political conditions, such competition can take the form of violent conflict.
- ❑ Population growth becomes a drive for scarcity in that it boosts the demand for a specific resource.
- ❑ The entire Nile Basin is confronted with rapid population growth

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- ❑ The United Nations Population Division (UNPD) also estimates that the total population in the Nile basin will reach 647 million by 2030 which represents a 7.8 per cent increase from the population in 2025 and an increase of 52 per cent for the population in 2010. It also estimates that just over half of these people will be living within the basin boundaries (Nile Basin Initiative, 2012b:228). This rapid population growth increases pressure on the natural resource base (UNEP, 2006:1).
- ❑ Given the fact that domestic agricultural demand to sustain a growing population has exacerbated the scarcity of water, however, this growing demand is not only limited to the basin countries.
- ❑ For instance, India and Saudi Arabia have turned to large-scale land and agricultural investments in upstream countries (i.e. Ethiopia, South Sudan and other East African countries) also to help feed their growing population

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- ▣ According to the World Water Council report (2006), the population growth concentrated in the river basin and the migration to the NRB has further exacerbated this population activity.

2. Supply-Induced Scarcity

- ▣ Supply-induced scarcity results from degradation or depletion of natural resources
- ▣ Human-induced decline in the quality and quantity of renewable resources
- ▣ This environmental degradation or depletion decreases the overall available amount of a limited natural resource, therefore decreasing the amount available to each individual
- ▣ A drop in the supply of a key resource assumes that the resource pie shrinks because there has been a reduction in quantity and quality, and this is a key driver of violence because resources become scarce and people then start fighting over them

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- ❑ The manner in which the land, water and watershed are degraded in the Nile basin has continued to produce and sustain poverty.
- ❑ Factors such as unsustainable pastoralism, rapid population growth, land degradation, agriculture, industry and domestic use and the high dependence of all eleven riparian countries on the Nile River Basin has caused it to deplete.
- ❑ Hence resources fail to provide a sustainable or desired flow of water to neighbouring communities and countries, and therefore exert even greater pressure on the available water resources.

3. Structural-Induced Scarcity

- ▣ Structural scarcity refers to the unequal access or distribution of natural resources.
- ▣ This is a form of scarcity that applies only to certain groups that, relative to other groups, are excluded from equal access to particular resources.
- ▣ Structural scarcities emerge when more powerful segments of water users confiscate a larger part of the scarce resource.
- ▣ This assumes that some individuals, groups or states get disproportionately large slices of the pie while other groups get slices that are too small
- ▣ One of the most contentious issues related to the Nile River is the utilisation of available water resources

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- ❑ The Nile River extends across political borders and as a result has created misunderstandings or lack of beneficial agreements about the allocation of water, therefore making it very unevenly distributed
- ❑ The Nile became subject to numerous colonial agreements deemed responsible for structurally denying upstream riparian countries access to and utilisation of the Nile in favour of Egypt and Sudan today
- ❑ Amongst those eleven riparian countries I mentioned earlier, only Egypt and Sudan remain important from the rest regarding the standpoint of the Nile waters in which the remaining nine riparian countries are sidelined from the benefits of the Nile waters as far as these agreements are concerned.

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1	The 1891 Protocol
2	The 1902 Treaty
3	the 1906
4	the 1906 Tripartite Agreement
5	the 1925 Exchange of Notes between Italy and UK
6	The 1929 Agreements
7	1959 Agreement

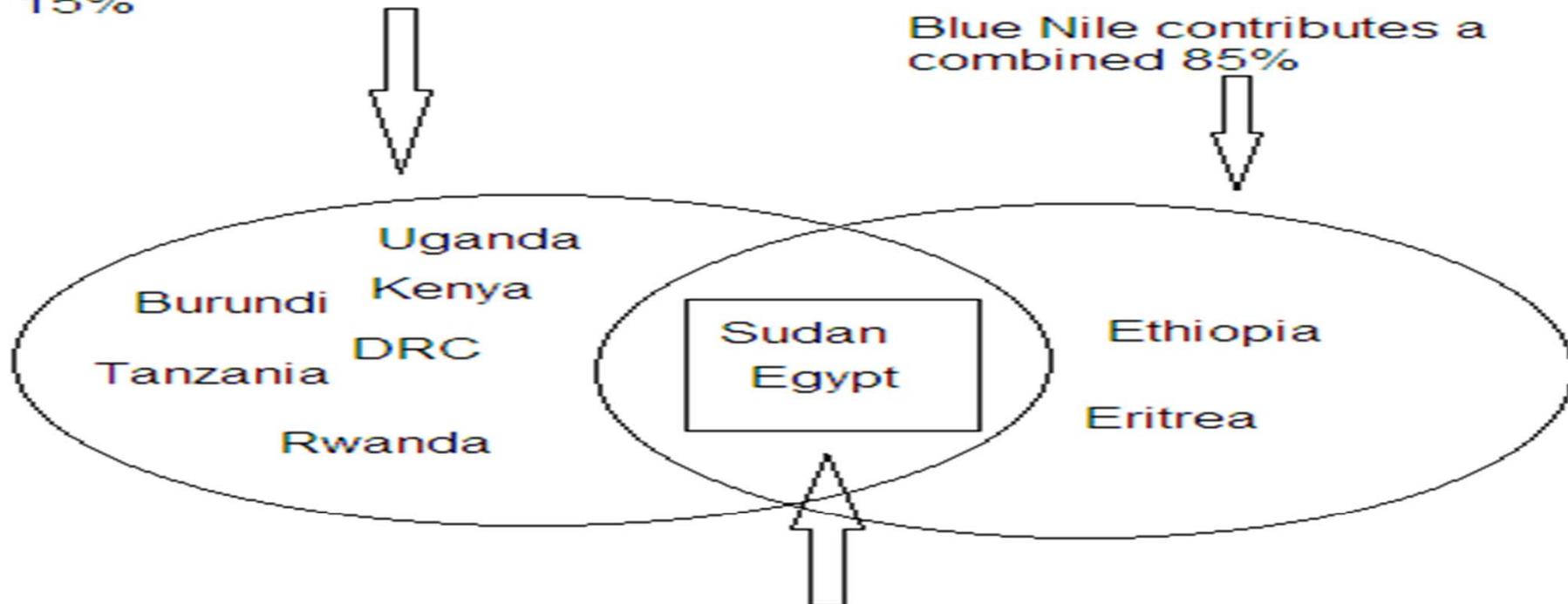
- And in their provisions respectively they shared the same principle “*securing recognition of the principle that no upper-basin state had the right to interfere with the flow of the Nile in respect of Egypt*”

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▣ Contribution and distribution of the Nile

White Nile contributes a combined 15%

Blue Nile contributes a combined 85%



Zero contribution but draws 18,5 and 55,5 BCM respectively

AFRICAN UNION

- ❑ As a regional organisation, the AU represents a highly possible mechanism for the sustainability, **management [Demand and Supply]** and utilisation **[Structural]** of the Nile.
- ❑ The AU has acknowledged the causal relationship that exists between environmental scarcity and conflicts
- ❑ Its environmental regime is one of its oldest regimes.
- ❑ One of the earliest conventions adopted in 1968 by the AU's predecessor, the OAU, is the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.
- ❑ It emphasises the adverse impact of environmental change on human security
- ❑ It also outlines crucial steps in the preservation of natural resources
- ❑ The convention's fundamental principle outlines measures by which member states can conserve, utilize and develop, among other things, land and soil, and water resources with due regard to the best interests of the people
- ❑ And this Convention outlines two most significant articles:

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1. Firstly, Article IV on Land and Soil, sections 1, 2, 3 and 4: *“ensures to prevent land degradation through implementing land tenure policies to: establish land-use plans based on scientific investigations; implement **agricultural practices** and **agrarian reforms**; improve and introduce **soil conservation, sustainable farming** and **forestry practices**; and, control **pollution** and **erosion** caused by **agricultural activities, mining** and the disposal of **wastes**”*.
2. Secondly, Article V on Water, sections 3: proposes considerable provisions in preserving water and minimizing the possibility of water related disputes in trans-boundary basins. *“Where surface or underground water resources are shared by two or more of the contracting states, the latter shall act in consultation, and if the need arises, set up inter-state commissions to study and resolve problems arising from the joint use of these resources, and for the joint development and conservation thereof”*.

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- ▣ Nonetheless, the Nile still remains a high priority risk as far as the sustainability, management and utilisation of the Nile is concerned.....And WHY IS THIS?????
- ▣ Four [4] reasons for the AU's failure to address the Nile disputes:
 1. Third party involvement and foreign aid dependence
 2. Power relations within the AU as far as the upstream & downstream debate is concerned
 3. Structural-induced scarcity over demand and supply-induced scarcities
 4. Political ideology vs. win-win inter-riparian solution

1. Third party involvement and foreign aid dependence

- ❑ The AU faces challenges to address issues detrimental to the Nile cooperation, peace and security agenda due to the problems of financial dependence on foreign donors.
- ❑ For the construction of the new AU headquarters African countries paid for only about 40 percent of the AU's budget, China, the European Union and the US paid for the rest
- ❑ *“the AU has been finding itself in difficult situations since the finances from donors almost always come with strings attached. It's not possible that the partners will always align themselves to your priorities. That is always the danger you face. Partners have got their biases. You may find partners preferring certain areas of cooperation.”* (Erastus Mwencha, the deputy chairperson of the AU)
- ❑ For instance, Ethiopia's intention to construct the Dam was opposed by the WB. In 2009 during the Alexandria meeting, WB officials said they would not fund any projects without the approval of Egypt stating that “Egypt is the leading country in this consortium and the WB will not get behind any initiative that leaves them [Egypt] out”

2. AU's position on the Upstream-Downstream dispute

- ▣ **Location** – Upstream vs. **Funding** – Downstream
- ▣ The AU faces internal challenges of power relations, due to the fact that Arab states, Egypt in particular, are the financial backbone of the AU project.
- ▣ Egypt contributes 15 per cent to the AU's general budget
- ▣ And on the one hand, the AU is headquartered upstream in Ethiopia
- ▣ And in this sense the AU finds itself between a rock and a hard place because any action against either Ethiopia or Egypt can prove very costly for the AU.

3. Structural-Induced Scarcity over Demand and Supply- Induced Scarcities

- ▣ Uneven distribution never acts on its own; its impact is always a function of its interaction with resource demand and supply
- ▣ The NRB countries are still confronted with challenges of land degradation etc. Each and every riparian country experiences different levels of degradation
- ▣ Land degradation is discussed because it is linked to the quality, volume and timing of water flow in the basin
- ▣ However, the commission has been entirely focused on the adverse impact that the distribution of the Nile (i.e. upstream-downstream disputes) has on the peace and security of the region and has done little to consider factors detrimental to the degradation and depletion of the Nile either between and/or within upstream and downstream riparian countries

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Land Degradation in the Nile

Land Degradation between and within the Nile countries

Rwandan genocide led to massive displacements which left 60% of its forest damaged thus leaving 70% of its land severely degraded

Burundi lost 30% of its land to degradation

In 2002, 30% of Kenya's land faced severe degradation in which by 2008 one third of its population was dependent on this degraded land

76% of Sudan population resides in degraded areas

The highlands of Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania are also subject to degradation, also Egypt's north-western delta faces the highest degradation due to contamination and increased salinity

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Agriculture

There are over 90 agricultural drains (industrial wastewater) that discharge into the Nile

29 BCM of drainage water contains pesticides residues and toxic pollutants - High Salinization

Industry / Mining

Mines in Kilembe [Uganda] release large quantities of copper and cobalt

36 industries discharge their pollution directly into the Nile

4. Political ideology rather than a sustainable inter-riparian solution

- *“on the road to negotiations or cooperation, Ethiopia and Egypt should look at the win-win situation in a new context, that is, not in the context of colonial powers, but in the context of Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance”*
(Dr.NkosazanaDlaminiZuma, 2013)
- This appears to be an indictment against the AU since it seems to put focus on political ideology as opposed to truly creating a win-win scenario between the Nile states on the basis of actual material gain.
- the AU has not identified how these win-win gains are to be achieved and whether they are to be achieved “*not in the context of colonial powers*” entails drafting new agreements, thus, in effect challenging the standpoint of Egypt of the Nile waters
- Such ideological posturing means little when upstream riparian countries need water for domestic and agricultural use.

CONCLUSION

- ❑ YES! The AU is eager to address Environmental Scarcity, and YES it is eager to address the Nile water conflicts
- ❑ But how will it do so without understanding these three kinds of scarcity?
- ❑ While the Nile remains the main source of water for the eleven countries that make up the basin, its water is barely adequate to satisfy the rising water demands of the region
- ❑ Water is not only scarce because it is structurally denied to people, but also because it has been used unsustainably
- ❑ There is a need for an institutional structure that understands these kinds of scarcity in order for it to address water related competition or conflict,
- ❑ With this being said, the AU will fail to achieve the difficult goals of conflict resolution and regional cooperation in the NRB

Recommendations

- ❑ Alongside pursuing a sustainable inter-riparian solution to the Nile dispute, The AU need to consider addressing the Nile water agreements in conjunction with rising population and the degradation of the Nile.