

International Water Management Issue: An overview of the Nile River

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Abstract

The Nile River is the longest river in the world. The River run through nine Nations states; Burundi Egypt, Democratic republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. The conflict arising is due to the 1959 agreement which gives Egypt the largest share of the river flow. Due to the increase in population growth, the demand for food is increasing in the other riparian countries therefore leading to governments seeking for a review of the agreement. The political relation has in a way provided a means of negotiation between the Nile countries. This to an extend leads to the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI). The overview of agreements shows attempts by countries to assert sovereignty or at least control over the access to the waters of the Nile, largely through bilateral agreements. The current challenge lies in moving away from bilaterism towards shared management of all riparian countries.

Introduction

Water seems to be essential when it comes to the issue of protection of the health of humans, supporting the production of food, sustaining economic development in a country and also in provision of hydroelectric power. Water security seems to be a major problem that is facing various people and this is mainly based on the ever increasing population, water misuse, contamination of water, inefficient irrigation and the heightened level of various natural disasters for example, the floods and droughts. Among the list, the increase in population seems to be the most serious issue to the adequacy of water since an increase in population leads to an increase in the volume of water that is required for domestic, food production and industrial use (Nile Basin Initiative 2005).

Since most water sources are shared by various states, an increase in population in one state will adversely affect the water that is received by the neighboring states or countries. This situation mainly leads to the creation of dams as well as to the alterations of watercourse so as to offer additional irrigation in a particular country, consequently reallocating water allotments in the all the sharing countries (Gleick 2000). The urge to exploit the shared water supplies seems to be a catalyst for activating animosity. Therefore in this context, River Nile seems to offer one of the significant or at times importance of shared water in the horn of Africa.

Historical background

Adequate access to water seems to be a vital aspect for survival. According to the world water council report 2006, a large number of people around the world lack good drinking water and proper sanitation. The Nile is shared by ten countries and the ten countries seem to account for only 10% of the land in Africa (Population Action International 2001). Subsequent to this, a number of riparian countries which at times use the Nile River for been the main source of water have showed a direct risk in it (Rahman 2011). The Nile River is termed as globes longest river and it flows from the south to the north and its catchment covers about 10% of the African continent. The length of the Nile amounts to 6,800 km (Deng 2007). The river has a total of three tributaries that is the Blue Nile, the White Nile as well as the Atbara.

The source of river Nile is in Burundi and the water later flows into the nine other countries and empties in the Mediterranean Sea. Most people refer the flow of the river as the long flow since it flows from the south to the north. During the summer periods, most mountainous regions in Ethiopia are faced with prolonged episode of monsoon rainfall as well as ever increasing level of water in the Nile (Deng 2007). Flooding is mainly attributed to the development and emergence of fertile soils in Egypt and thus it is commonly termed as the earliest form of civilization that has occurred in the region (Swain 2002).

Conflicts of the Nile basin

River Nile has been a major cause of conflict and it seems to have taken a long period of time since the ancient Egyptian civilization, to the colonial period and it seems to be continuing even in the modern day. In the olden times, river Nile offered the Egyptians with all the fresh water that they used and it was referred to as a cultural symbol. The Egyptians seemed to be concerned with the issue that in future they could lose their access to water of river Nile and thus they undertook certain measures such as the invasion of Sudan and other noteworthy situations (Chatterji 2002).

The colonialism era seemed to mark the beginning of conflict over the Nile this was mainly based on the fact that the colonizers were more aware of the role that the Nile water would have played in the prosperity of their colonies and more precisely Egypt. When the British conquered Sudan they got rid of all the vegetation that was obstructing the flow of river Nile and they also created additional drainage paths so as to improve and divert the flow. An agreement was signed with Ethiopia since it provides a large portion of the Nile water and the British did not have control over Ethiopia. In the past, the use of water from river Nile is commonly based on the Nile water agreement of the year 1959 and the 1929 Nile water. The later was signed by British colonial government and Egypt while the former was signed with Sudan.

Issues associated with the river Nile

A lot of controversies are still present since most of the countries are concerned with the legality of the agreements that were made since according to them, the treaties were signed without their contest and representation and it in one way or another the agreements affected them. This tends to question the fairness, reasonability as well as equitability of the agreements. Over time it has become evident to both Sudan and Egypt that the status quo is neither sustainable nor tenable (Tafesse 2001).

Haftendorn 2010, asserts that a number of conflicts do arise due to the use of the water from the river Nile. This seems to be evident in river Nile where other countries have been pressing for the equitable distribution of water resource so as to sustain their country economic development as well as the increasing population in their countries.

There exist numerous issues that are closely related to the use of water in the river Nile. Some issues seem to have been resolved while most of them still remain unresolved. One of the major issues is related to the pollution of river Nile (Varis 2000). While the quality of water in most areas is at the acceptable level there are other hot spots such as in the drainages and in the irrigation canals. Most of the sources of pollutants come from households, agricultural and industrial waste. There are a total of 36 industries which directly discharge their pollution sources to the river Nile. Most of the industries are mainly from the food, mining, chemical, emerging and electrical fields just to mention a few. The water from river Nile therefore surpasses the standards that have been set apart by the European community since it is highly contaminated and has high salinization and saline intrusion (Water Policy Program 2002). This has eventually led to high level of cancer due to the heavy metal deposits as well as the organochlorine pesticides that are mainly found in the water and in the soil.

Another issue is more related to the irrigation canals. Agriculture is viewed as the largest consumer of water in Egypt. Most drainage water that comes from the farms contains a lot of pollutants for example inorganic pollutants, pesticides residues and other toxic organic pollutants which seems to be harmful to the health of humans. It has also been found out the most of the water contains a number of intestinal helminth eggs as well as hookworms (Nile Basin Initiative 2002). Also in areas where they use water from the irrigation canals, the families end up using the same water for domestic purposes and they also dump the used water back into the canals. Other areas, farmers are forced to build illegal water wheel so as to have access to water thus leading to pollution of both land and water. Thus most people in the areas have been affected by the use and consumption of polluted water and most of them suffer from liver and kidney diseases (Wolf, Shira & Marc 2003). Lack of proper education on the effective irrigation methods and the use of improper irrigation methods as well as crops production mainly leads to failure of crops and pollution of the water canals (Land Center for Human Rights 2005). In areas where no prescribed operational structures are in place to assist the farmers in the pumping of the water, the farmers do not have adequate access to water and when they do the water is not enough to maintain all their crops and thus leading to crop failure in the areas.

The other issue that is closely connected to the one above is the farmers and the government. There exist a large number of agencies who are tasked with the duty of ensuring that the water is of good quality, nevertheless there data sharing and communication between the agencies seems to be underdeveloped (Karyabwite 2000). The lack of efficient planning as well as heightened level of corruption in most countries, the neglecting of concerns and improper level of education on crop management and irrigation seems to contribute to the poor quality of water (Kaluarachchi & Kim 2009). Irrespective of the fact that money is an important component when it comes to improving the above areas stricter regulations and rules can be efficient. Also the framers need to be educated on soil management, crop rotation and crop cycle.

Solutions and recommendations to the Nile issues

Based on the river Nile conflict a number of recommendations can be offered so as to decrease the level of conflict or to assist in resolving the conflict completely. There ought to be a strict realization of the NBI which at the times seems to be the best calculated driving force currently when it comes to resolving the potential to renowned conflict when it comes to the utilization of river Nile water (Haftendom 2010).

The other strategy can the adoption of various water management strategies which will go a long way in decreasing the heightened demand of water and an increase in the supply of water for example growth in population and adoption of other agricultural methods that tend to consume lesser amount of water. Through this the water from river Nile will be adequate for all the countries using it.

Another recommendation that can really solve the conflict that exists is the use and application of water diplomacy so as to come up with sustainable development, equality as well as peace (Gleick 2000). All the water management schemes ought to promote and enhance the equitable use of water not only for the current users but also for the future users of the resources. The schemes should also share the benefits; encourage participation and increase the level of access to the resource. There also ought to be a development of capacity of the civil groups so as to ensure that they contribute meaningfully to the initiative. This capacity building will assist a lot in bridging the gap that exists between the government and the civil society (Gardiner 2000). It will also play a great role in enabling the local users to demand equitable access to the benefits and this can be closely governed by the interstate agreements while at the same time continuing to be in line with the initiatives of the Nile basin and thus reducing the chances of conflict between the countries (Nileriver.com. 2001).

There also needs to be a coordination of efforts of all the multilateral and bilateral funding bodies that operates in the basin so as to be able to realize the synergies and ensure that there is cooperation over the use of water in the Nile. These institutions include but are not limited to the Swedish international development cooperation agency, the World Bank, the Canadian international development agency as well as the United Kingdom department for international development (El-Fadel, El-Fadl & El-Sayegh 2003).

The other recommendation is related to the creation of cooperative bridges between all the riparian borders. This will ensure that each of the countries is sensitive of the needs of the other country and this will eventually come up with an effective method in which they can be bale to share the resource without any conflict occurring between them (Baecher et al. 2000). Also through the cooperation they will be able to promote economic integration between the countries and thus the eradication of poverty in most countries. The last recommendation includes the enhancement of information as well as knowledge exchange and this can be achieved through training, information exchange and also through education. Through the education people will be able to take care of the water catchment areas and they will use the resource in the most appropriate manner for the benefit of all members of the society (Drake 2007).

Conclusion

From the above discussion water has been viewed as an important resource that plays a major role in the sustainance of the environment and also in sustainability of a countries economy need to be acknowledged by all individuals. The utilization of water by the riparian's seems to be a potential cause of conflict between them. However the numerous numbers of conflicts can be circumvented and in instances where they occur they ought to be resolved by the use of instruments of mutual cooperation between the concerned parties. As depicted in the above discussion the Nile River seems to present a clear as well as a present danger to all, thus the Nile basin initiative ought to be used since it seems to be a veritable conflict resolution method which can make the conflicting parties to agree on the way to handle the situation. The compete implementation of the initiative would eventually save the North Eastern Africa region from any possible disaster at times when the potential conflicts mainly do arise when it comes to the issue of using water that have been derived from river Nile and at times it relapse into a water war as Koffi Annan put it.

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