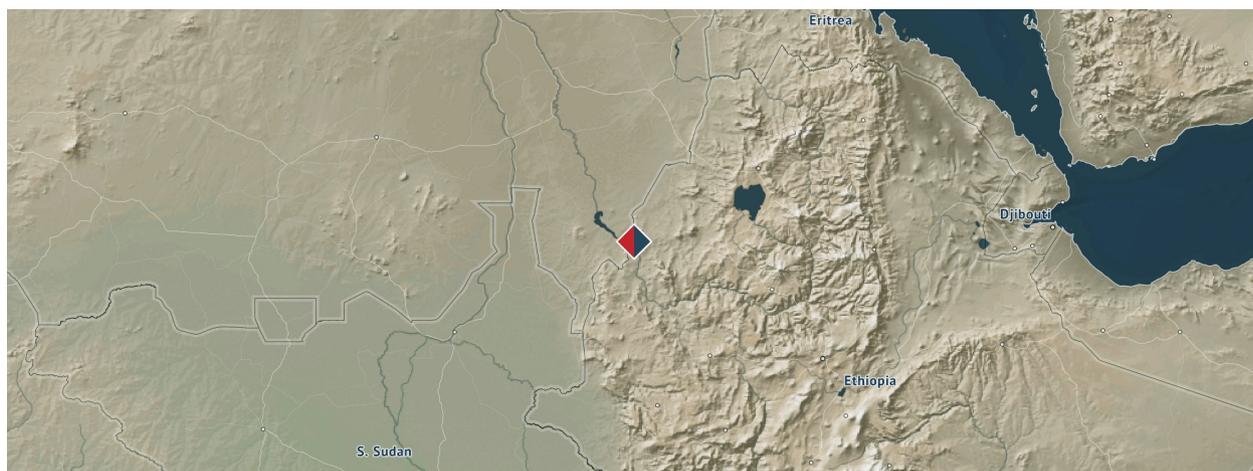




Conflict Factsheet

### Disputes over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)

Type of conflict Sub	Intensity 1
Conflict Locality Eastern Africa	Time 2011 –ongoing
Countries Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan	Resources Water



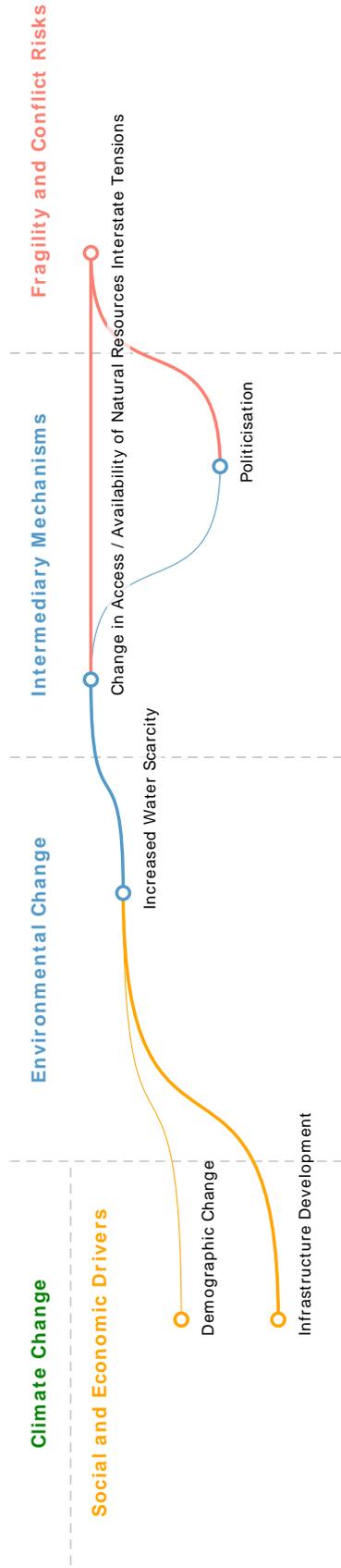
Transboundary  
water  
management

### Conflict Summary

There has long been a conflict over water rights among the riparian countries of the Eastern Nile Basin (Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia). The dispute has escalated in recent years due to a shift in the balance of power and Ethiopia's decision in 2011 to announce the construction of a major new dam, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), in the absence of any agreement with downstream Egypt. Whereas the last Egyptian government responded with belligerent rhetoric, the new Egyptian government has embraced trilateral negotiation (including Sudan) that have, in March 2015, resulted in a framework agreement.



### Conceptual Model



### Context Factors



Water





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## Conflict History

The Eastern Nile Basin comprises Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia. The crucial leverage regarding Egypt's water security lies with the Blue Nile countries Ethiopia and Sudan, as the Blue Nile is the main contributor to the Nile River's flow downstream. In fact, about 85 % of the overall Nile flow originates on Ethiopian territory (Swain, 2011). Ethiopia's determination to build a major new dam, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), for hydropower purposes has been the flashpoint of current conflicts in the Eastern Nile Basin (Gebreluel, 2014).

### Geopolitical importance

The Eastern Nile Basin is of critical geopolitical importance to the Nile's overall hydro-political regime. The Blue Nile is Ethiopia's largest river, with high potential for hydropower and irrigation. Ethiopia argues that developing this resource is crucial to its economic development, and to overcoming poverty and famine, that have plagued the country in the past. Ethiopia has the basin's most suitable locations for hydropower production, and its damming of the Blue Nile would significantly increase Sudan's potential for irrigated agriculture. Ethiopia has never 'consumed' significant shares of the Nile's water so far, as its previous political and economic fragility in combination with a lack of external financial support, due to persistent Egyptian opposition to projects upstream, prevented it from implementing large-scale projects. This has now changed due to political consolidation over the past two decades and the advent of alternative sources of external finance (to the traditional multilateral development banks), not least from China (IDS, 2013; Gebreluel, 2014).

### Non-cooperative parallel developments

Ethiopia and Sudan are currently developing and implementing water infrastructure developments unilaterally - as Egypt has done in the past and continues to do. These parallel developments appear to be elements of a bigger hydro-political strategy wherein the riparian countries aim to increase their water utilization to put facts on the ground (and underpin legal claims based on those uses) and increase their bargaining position for renegotiations of volumetric water allocations. However, this threatens the basin's long-term sustainability (as water use expands beyond what is environmentally feasible) and suboptimal in terms of capital allocation (as higher water use upstream may make downstream projects uneconomical (Swain, 2011)).

### The 1959 Agreement: an asymmetrical water-sharing arrangement

As stipulated by an Agreement of 1959 (see: [Nile Main Conflict](#)), Egypt and Sudan presented for several decades a common position vis-à-vis other riparians regarding the utilization and management of Nile waters. Despite the fact that newly independent Sudan in the late 1950s was literally forced by a dominant Egypt into a highly asymmetrical water-sharing arrangement, Sudan has rarely challenged this arrangement. However, Sudan's future water requirements will likely exceed its water quota as defined in the 1959 Agreement. This represents a new challenge to the basin's current hydro-political regime and status quo, as it may drive Sudan's interest in renegotiating its current quota (Link et al., 2012; Whittington et al., 2014).



### Ethiopia's challenge to the 1959 Agreement

The unilateral decision taken by Ethiopia - which never recognized the 1959 agreement but had previously not been able to challenge it in fact - to build the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in 2011 represents a major political challenge to the 1959 Agreement. It signifies that Egypt's de facto veto power on major upstream dams has been broken, and it clearly demonstrates the political will of Ethiopia to develop its water infrastructure even in the absence of a comprehensive basin agreement. Political instability in Egypt played an important role as the announcement of the project coincided with the resignation of President Mubarak during the Arab Spring. Ethiopia's interests in developing its water resources are driven by its growing population and high demand for socio-economic development (Gebreluel, 2014).

### The GERD potential benefits and disadvantages

The GERD has the potential to act both as driver for conflict, but also for cooperation. It provides clear benefits to all three riparian, such as flood control, reduced flood damages and sediment control. Moreover, with GERD, Ethiopia opts for a "hydropower" expansion strategy on the Blue Nile, and not an "irrigation strategy". This is good news for Egypt and Sudan as hydropower means little actual water withdrawal. However, it also entails potential negative effects on Egypt, if not carefully managed (see also [Security implications of growing water scarcity in Egypt](#)). The filling regime and operational methods of GERD will affect Egypt, in particular through its impact on the operation of its Aswan High Dam (AHD) which aims at mitigating the high variability of the Nile River flow. The filling time is estimated to take about 10 years, during which the Blue Nile water flows would be reduced. The 10 year filling time of GERD will likely contribute to fastened salinization in Egypt. If it were to take place during a sequence of years in which the Blue Nile flow and the AHD reservoir itself was low, Egypt might not be able to withdraw sufficient water supplies to meet all of its agricultural needs. Moreover, after the completion of the GERD, Egypt could run short of water if the operation of the GERD was not carefully coordinated with that of the AHD. Lastly, over-year storage facilities upstream in Ethiopia will allow Sudan to increase its water use. While this means new opportunities to develop extended irrigation-based agriculture for the Sudanese, it represents also a new threat for Egypt's' current Nile water utilization (Whittington et al., 2014). Resolutions efforts have recently led to encouraging results in terms of cooperation.

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### Resolution Efforts

After announcing the dam's construction, and with a view to the increasing tensions, the Ethiopian government invited both Egypt and Sudan to form an International Panel of Experts (IPoE) to solicit understanding of the benefits, costs and impacts of the GERD. The IPoE report recommended two studies to assess the environmental and socio-economic impacts of GERD and was interpreted by both the Egyptian and the Ethiopian government as a vindication of their respective positions. Despite several tripartite meetings between November 2013 and January 2014, no agreement was reached on the implementation of the IPoE recommendations and controversies were evolving around the constitution of a trilateral committee. The change of government in Egypt led to a more conciliatory approach (Von Lossow & Roll, 2015).



### **Egypt's new stance**

Egypt's original goal was to have the project purely and simply cancelled. Given the advancement of the dam construction - the GERD being, as of March 2015, 40 percent complete, according to Ethiopia - Egypt had good reason to reconsider its position ([Nazaret, 2015](#)). Tripartite negotiations resumed three weeks after Al-Sisi took office in June 2014. Between August and October 2014, a tripartite National Committee (TNC) was constituted, consisting of national experts. Rules of procedure of the TNC and Terms of References for two studies were agreed and an international tender organized. The study results are expected for 2015. The new Egyptian government seems to deal with the dam more as a matter of fact issue. Upon signing a framework agreement in March 2015, Al-Sisi and Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn hailed the agreement as a 'new chapter in relations between Egypt and Ethiopia ... based on openness and mutual understanding and cooperation' ([Nazaret, 2015](#)).

### **Towards a political agreement**

A political requirement will be to agree on rules for filling the GERD reservoir and on operating rules for the GERD, especially during periods of drought. All three countries have a vested interest in a properly operated dam. Egypt wants control and guarantees for its share of Nile waters. Ethiopia needs regional customers for its hydropower to ensure the economic feasibility of the GERD. Sudan's agricultural and hydropower interests align with those of Ethiopia while it has a strong interest in not alienating its 'big brother' and northern neighbour, Egypt, with whom it shares a long and partly contested border ([Whittington et al., 2014](#)). The situation seemed to improve in the beginning of 2015 when tripartite negotiations were held in order to determine principles of cooperation. In March 2015, a 'Declaration of Principles' was signed by the leaders of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, setting the foundations for an initial cooperation ([Sudan Tribune, 2015a](#)). This agreement could pave the way for a more detailed cooperation framework, and represents a major step toward dispute resolution.

### **Significant hurdles still remain**

However, there is still a lot of work ahead. The principles of cooperation have yet to be translated into specific technical agreements on dam management (and more), in the context of difficult domestic politics for both sides. Neither the Egyptian nor the Ethiopian leader received positive domestic feedback on their agreement. Many historical grievances and distrust remain on the Ethiopian side regarding Egypt ([Gebreluel, 2014](#)). Some Ethiopian journalists assess the 'declaration of principle' as being more in favour of Egypt than Ethiopia ([Zegabi East Africa News, 2015](#)). On the other side, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt denounced a 'high treason' ([Sudan Tribune, 2015b](#)). The dispute, although deescalating, is therefore still on-going between Egypt and Ethiopia, while Sudan has been acting as a mediator between the two states (see [Von Lossow & Roll, 2015](#)).



## Intensities & Influences



### INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity



Human Suffering



### INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Diplomatic Crisis

Note of diplomatic crisis in case history, conflict purely verbal



Violent Conflict

No



Salience with nation

National



Mass displacement

None



Cross Border Mass Displacement

No



## Resolution Success

Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.



Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

The capacity to address grievances in the future has increased.



Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been mostly addressed.



Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

Conflict resolution strategies have been clearly responsible for the decrease in conflict intensity.





## Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

### Mediation & arbitration

2

A tripartite National Committee (TNC), consisting of national experts from Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan, was constituted in order to determine principles of cooperation. The dispute, although deescalating, is still on-going between Egypt and Ethiopia, while Sudan has been acting as a mediator between the two states.

### Treaty/agreement

3

In March 2015, a 'Declaration of Principles' was signed by the leaders of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, setting the foundations for an initial cooperation. A political requirement will be to agree on rules for filling the GERD reservoir and on operating rules for the GERD, especially during periods of drought. This agreement could pave the way for a more detailed cooperation framework, and represents a major step toward dispute resolution.

## Resources and Materials

### Conflict References

[Dispute over Water in the Nile Basin](#)

### References with URL

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[Link, P.M., Piontek, F., Scheffran, J. & Schilling, J. \(2012\). On Foes and Flows: Vulnerabilities, Adaptive Capacities and Transboundary Relations in the Nile River Basin in Times of Climate Change. L'Europe en Formation 365\(3\), 99-138](#)

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[Sudan Tribune, 2015b](#)

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[Whittington, D., Waterbury, J., & Jeuland, M. \(2014\). The grand renaissance dam and prospects for cooperation on the eastern Nile. Water Policy, 16\(4\), 595-608](#)

[Zegabi East Africa News, 2015](#)

Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/eastern-nile-basin-dispute-over-millennium-dam-ethiopia>