

Smooth seas
do not make
skilful sailors

Current Nile Basin affairs certainly couldn't be described as "smooth seas": floods and droughts, environmental degradation, violent conflict, swelling populations, competing interests, and stressed water resources, all compounded by climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. All these challenges have whipped up turbulent seas. Reporting on these issues, while upholding journalistic standards like truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, and public accountability – makes skilful sailors indeed.

This The Niles issue welcomes a range of outstanding journalists into the spotlight: the 25 winners of the Nile Media Awards 2021, the third edition of a competition organised by the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) and its partners to "recognise journalists for balanced reporting on Nile Cooperation". These winning stories show that if we seek to thrive, and not merely survive, we have to cooperate rather than compete. This, after all, is the key to navigating today's rough seas, and hopefully to enable us all to land on safe shores.



The Niles

Issue #16
Entebbe, Uganda
September 2021

River Nile politics
p. 8

Ethiopia dam filling
impact 'limited' – if no
drought
p. 16

How climate change
damages children's
education
p. 27

The Nile:
A shared destiny
p. 32

Bread: The food that
sparks revolutions
p. 38

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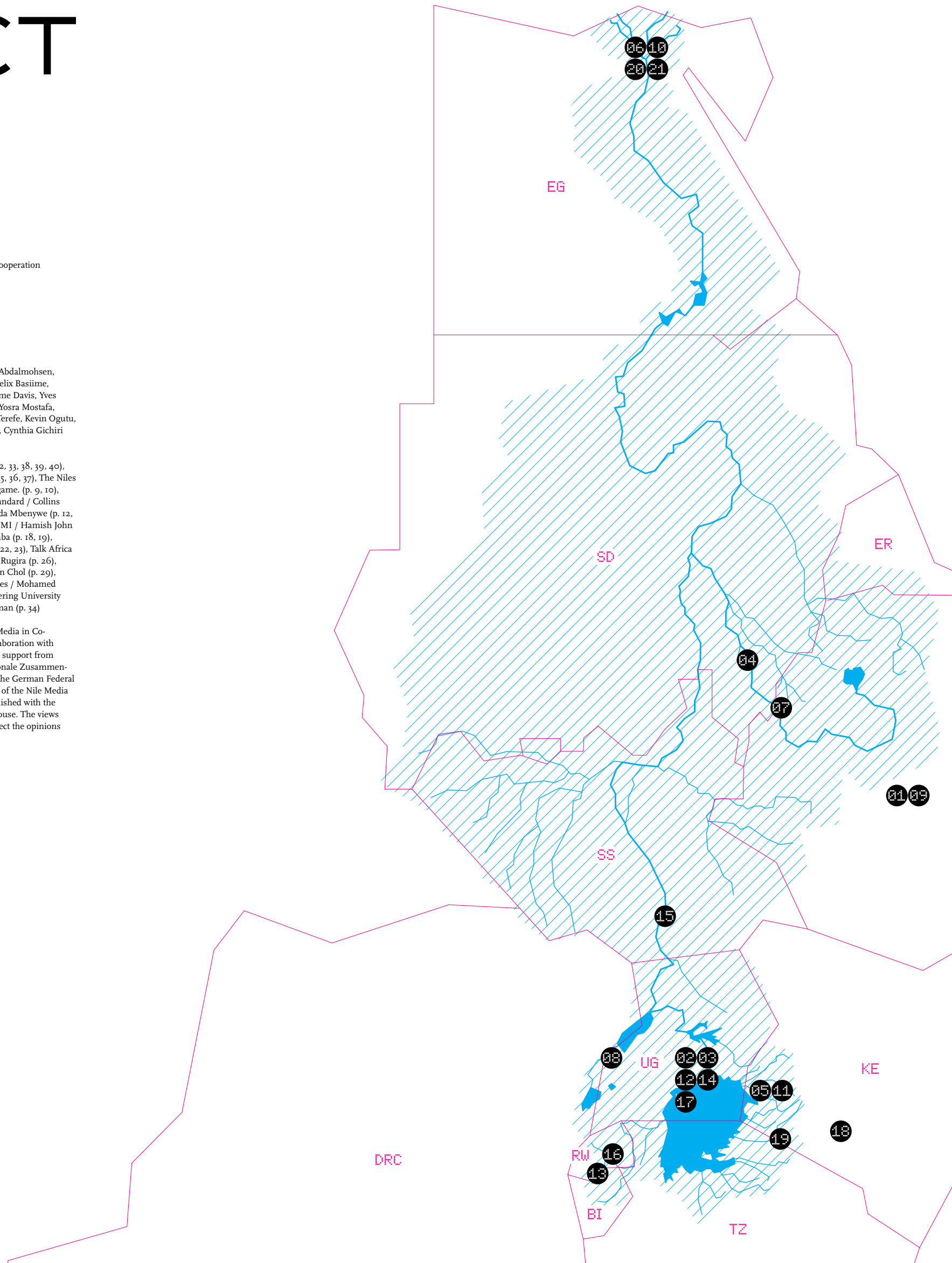
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Cover:
A sailor in Egypt's capital
Cairo.
Photo: The Niles /
Asmaa Gamal



Contents

01		Henry Lutaaya Nile Media Awards champion professional, impactful reporting on Nile Basin issues	P. 04
02	print	Henry Lutaaya A few words with Ronald Musoke	P. 06
03	1st	Ronald Musoke River Nile politics	P. 08
04	2nd	Rehab Abd Almohsen Sudan's floods: The raging river is a victim of extreme climate	P. 10
05	3rd	Mactilda Mbenywe Villagers flee as 'gods of the lake' cross boundaries	P. 12
06	digital	Elzahraa Jadallah A few words with Rehab Abd Almohsen	P. 14
07	1st	Rehab Abd Almohsen Ethiopia dam filling impact 'limited' – if no drought	P. 16
08	2nd	Felix Basiime Karangura: Caught between the COVID-19 pandemic and a water crisis	P. 18
09		Are you more of a number or a word person?	P. 20
10	3rd-1	Bassem Aboualabass Nile dam dispute spills onto social media	P. 22
11	3rd-2	Pius Sawa Shrinking fish population in Lake Victoria: Kenyans turn to Uganda and China for supplies	P. 24
12	radio	Mugume Davis A few words with Yves Rugira	P. 26
13	1st	Yves Rugira How climate change damages children's education	P. 27
14	2nd	Natoolo Sarah How member states benefit from the Nile Basin Initiative	P. 28
15	3rd	Waakhe Simon Wudu Tackling growing challenges of water scarcity	P. 29
16	tv	Mugume Davis A few words with Sadiki Businge and Mugume Davis	P. 30
17	1st	Yosra Mostafa, Sadiki Businge, Asmaa Gamal, Dagim Terefe, Kevin Ogutu, Mohamed Hilali, Joel Bebe, Akuot Chol, Mugume Davis The Nile: A shared destiny	P. 32
18	2nd	Cynthia Gichiri The hydro quagmire	P. 34
19	3rd	Kevin Ogutu Saving the Mara Basin: Stakeholders want Mau settlers moved	P. 35
20	photo	Elzahraa Jadallah A few words with Asmaa Gamal	P. 36
21	1st	Asmaa Gamal Bread: The food that sparks revolutions	P. 38

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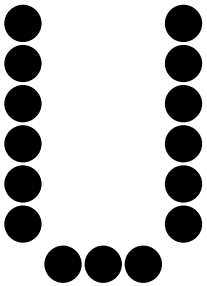
Nile Media Awards champion professional, impactful reporting on Nile Basin issues

The third edition of the Nile Media Awards (NMA) was held in Addis Ababa - Ethiopia, on May 7, 2021, shining a spotlight on professional and impactful reporting on the challenges and opportunities in the Nile Basin.

By Henry Lutaaya
Kampala, Uganda

Journalist covering the Nile
Day celebrations in Khartoum,
Sudan, on February 22, 2020.
Photo: The Niles / Dominik
Lehnert





Unlike the two previous editions of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) event, this year's awards were coupled with financial rewards by several supporting organisations for Nile Cooperation. Plaques and certificates were also handed out to the winners.

A record of 25 awards were issued, representing the diverse and growing landscape of media platforms and seeking to promote collaborations among journalists and encourage more female voices and participation in the event.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the winners from attending the closing ceremony of the 6th Nile Basin Development Forum (NBDF) in Ethiopia in May 2021.

Egypt's Rehab Abd Almohsen, who emerged the overall winner with three awards, was an exception and took part in the live event, watched by hundreds of participants of the NBDF – who mostly witnessed the closing ceremony online.

Fortunately, six more winners managed to collect their awards shortly after. This happened on June 11 in Entebbe at Uganda's Water Resources Institute, a stone's throw from the NBI Secretariat, during the closing ceremony of a week-long media training organised

by the Nile Equatorial Lakes Sub-Regional Action Programme (NELSAP), one of the subsidiary arms of the regional body.

The Entebbe event's chief guest, Joyce Nyeko, who is also the Director of Fisheries Resources in Uganda's Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF), spoke about the need for more professional and sustained reporting on the Nile Basin to boost cooperation but as well as fair sharing of the water of the Nile Basin.

She urged the media to shine a light on the opportunities and challenges facing the basin while at the same time observing the highest standards of professionalism in their reporting.

Jane Kyomuhendo Baitwa, the outgoing Head of Communication and Stakeholder Engagement at NBI, also advocated for more active reporting about the Nile Basin issues, noting that more accurate reporting, especially about achievements of Nile Cooperation, challenges and opportunities, will go a long way in reducing fears of loss of sovereignty.

She added that reckless statements and reports by the media, amplified by their broad reach, can prove costly, delaying or derailing negotiations, whose outcomes affect millions of people.

The urgency and importance of the task at hand are not lost on the media practitioners themselves.

Uganda's Ronald Musoke, who scooped the highest award in the print category of the 3rd edition of the NMA, highlighted the increasing relevance of a professional journalist who double-checks facts and is alert to sensitivities regarding sovereign concerns. He emphasised this role as an essential counterweight to rapidly spreading rumours and misinformation on social media platforms.

Fredrick Mugira, the co-founder of InfoNile, an online website that is dedicated to reporting on Nile issues and a member of the judging panel for the Nile Media Awards, argued that for journalists to report accurately about transboundary cooperation, they need to be trained regularly and equipped with updated

information to make a compelling case for cooperation as opposed to competition for resources.

He said journalists should shift their gaze from the banal event-based stories influenced by politicians to more creative spheres like solutions-based reporting.

"A trained and experienced journalist would, for example, investigate or analyse the decision-making process by politicians and technocrats that underpin challenges, such as water scarcity. That is better than simply reporting about the problem," Mugira said, adding that training helps secure such skillsets.

He said the media still has some way to go but praised the rising standard of entries in the third edition of the Nile Media Awards.

"There was high quality: We saw a lot of cross-border collaborations, showing that journalists are now concentrating on enterprise reporting and less on event-based stories. Journalists are running away from nationalistic sentiments by venturing out beyond their borders to do transboundary stories, instead of looking at the Nile as a strictly national resource."

Mugira, however, remained concerned about lingering nationalistic tendencies that prevade media reporting in some countries.

"Some journalists still live in fear of reporting the truth. There are countries in the Nile Basin that consider issues of the Nile as national security matters. When journalists report about these subjects, they are quizzed. So the journalists tend to report with fear and not from an objective perspective," argued Mugira.

As well as signals of improving journalistic quality, there is also growing interest among partners, including the German Government, the European Union and media training institutions like the Netherlands-based IHE Delft. By offering financial support for the 2021 awards, they fan hopes that journalism will have a more significant impact in the Nile Basin in the months and years ahead.



A few words with Ronald Musoke

Ronald Musoke (centre)
receiving his award in Entebbe,
Uganda.
Photo: The Niles / Henry
Lutaaya

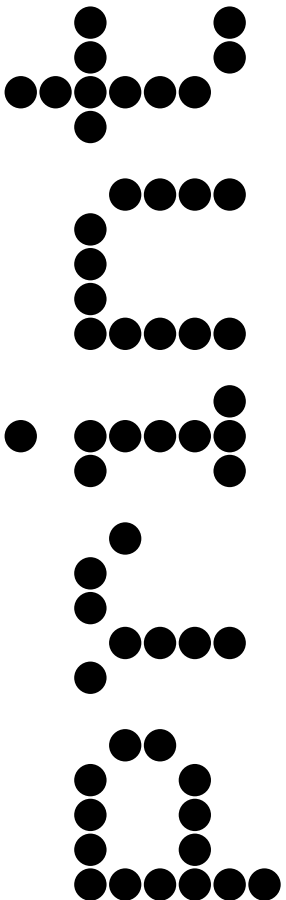



By Henry Lutaaya,
Kampala, Uganda

Ronald Musoke, who writes for *The Independent Magazine of Uganda*, was the overall winner in the print category of the third edition of the Nile Media Awards. The Niles' Henry Lutaaya spoke with him about his award, for which he scooped a USD 1,500 cash prize, a plaque and certificate. Ronald gives his insights on the media's role in fostering Nile Basin cooperation.

The Niles: Your story titled 'River Nile Politics' was about the shuttle diplomacy manoeuvres conducted by Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in East and Central Africa in 2017. Why did you work on that particular story?

Ronald Musoke: I picked this story to create understanding and give our readers perspective on President el-Sisi's real motivation for the tour. Although el-Sisi's handlers said the objective of his visits was "consolidating Egypt's political and economic relations" with the targeted countries, I particularly found the choice of some Nile Basin countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda) instructive, especially in as far as changing Egypt's approach to Nile Cooperation from the combative stance earlier adopted by his successor, the late President Hosni Mubarak, to a more conciliatory stance his government adopted. This is why I ended up writing this story.





The work journalists do every day eventually creates an impact.”

TN: Do you think this story and your other stories have an impact?

RM: To be honest, it isn't straightforward to gauge the impact of specific stories I produce. Generally speaking, while some journalist's work is directly cited or picked on by a government department or officials to make a decision or effect specific changes in the way things work, other stories are not as directly impactful. But there are instances where I think some of my stories have created an impact.

I remember when a commissioner in the Ministry of Water and Environment called me asking for a story I had written on water use in business entities (especially industries). She wanted to attach the story on the Ministry's project proposal they were working on to present to their donors. I still think many more of my stories influence policy debate both within and outside Uganda. I tend to follow up most of my published work, and it is always gratifying to find some of the stories referenced by researchers in international research papers. That, for me, is one way of noticing the impact of the stories I produce.

TN: Journalism is often a daring job. What is your motivation?

RM: Yes, it is a daring job and, for environmental journalists, it is dangerous every other day. But, we have to continue writing about natural resources issues because, in our part of the world (sub-Saharan Africa), millions of people directly depend on these resources. The way they are managed can create a big difference in people's lives.

For instance, take an 'investor' who is given a considerable portion of a riverbank or lake-shore to build a resort hotel that blocks thousands of people from accessing the water, thus infringing on the rights of those people. Should journalists take an interest in this project? Obviously, we need to know what, for instance, this investor is giving the community in exchange for their rights to this river.

Sometimes, the stories we report are ignored, but, for me, we must keep writing about these issues for the precise reason I have shared above. I think the work journalists do every day eventually creates an impact. This sometimes may not be instant, but, at least, when we go on record, we know that this record will one day be used for redress. So I, therefore, know that the work I do daily is not in vain.

TN: In a nutshell, what's your take on current Nile Basin Affairs and Nile Cooperation?

RM: The Nile is obviously an essential resource for each of the 11 countries in its basin. This explains the eternal tension among the Nile Basin countries. We already know about the stop-start negotiations between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Sometimes the rhetoric can be threatening, but it is also good that the cooperative framework that exists among the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) member states presents an excellent opportunity for the governments and the people in these countries to avoid unnecessary friction.

For me, I am confident that common sense will always prevail, and the hundreds of millions of people in the Nile Basin will live in harmony over the coming years. There are no winners if we choose to use violence or even war to resolve outstanding issues of the River Nile. This is why I think the media's role in fostering peace within the Nile Basin will remain critical over the coming years.

TN: What do you think needs to be done to ensure more and better Nile Cooperation?

RM: I would like to think that the avenues for fostering cooperation within the Nile Basin already exist, and they are pretty robust. The Nile Basin Initiative is probably one of the best programmes, and long may it continue.

At an intergovernmental level, I would like to see our leaders discuss some of the pressing issues in the Nile Basin with both mutual

respect and honesty. Our leaders need to understand that so much has changed over the last five decades in each of these Nile Basin countries. With rapidly growing populations across the basin, complicated by climate change, most member states are eager to secure their water resources, vital to sustaining the expanding population.

But for cooperation to succeed, we as journalists have to remind our audiences of the basic principle of giving and taking. We need to advocate for compromise as a precondition for cooperation. I also believe that our political leaders need to remain level-headed throughout the negotiation process. I think the River Nile is more useful if we share it equitably.

TN: How can the media and the journalists help foster better Nile Cooperation?

RM: The media has always played a critical role in cooperation among the Nile Basin countries. But the media has an even more critical role to play going forward. We live in a world that has rapidly changed in so many respects.

The advent of social media coupled with the post-truth era (where misinformation, disinformation and 'alternative facts' are rampant) makes mainstream journalism critical in a combustible region like the Nile Basin. It is, therefore, necessary for the mainstream media to report on issues about the Nile from an informed position. We shouldn't be quick to publish information that we are unsure about because it might be challenging to put out the flames. It is okay to be nationalistic but let us avoid being overly nationalistic. Let us call out the politicians who like putting out inflammatory statements. We need to fact check their statements a little more than usual.

We also need to celebrate even the small successes of cooperation within the Nile Basin. These help in building trust among the people of the Nile. I am hopeful that the media will remain vital in fostering Nile Cooperation over the coming years.

River Nile politics: Why President El-Sisi's 'shuttle diplomacy' in East Africa could change Egypt's fortunes

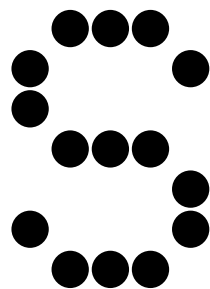
Rwanda's President Paul Kagame welcomes Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Kigali, August 15, 2017.
Photo: Flickr / Paul Kagame



Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi week-long tour of Gabon, Chad, Tanzania and Rwanda in 2017 did not go unnoticed within East Africa and the other Nile Basin states.

By Ronald Musoke,
Kampala, Uganda

Publication:
The Independent, August 25, 2017



isi's tour was aimed at "consolidating Egypt's political and economic relations as well as discussing ways of handling challenges facing Africa, especially terrorism".

But his visit, particularly to Rwanda and Tanzania – the first by an Egyptian president since Abdel Gamal Nasser in 1968 – was informative.

By then, Sisi has been in power for over three years and has already visited and held talks with the presidents of Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. Sisi's visit to Tanzania and Rwanda – two countries that are part of the Nile Basin – was the third and fourth in the space of six months in East Africa.

In February 2017, Sisi travelled to Nairobi and held bilateral talks with President Uhuru Kenyatta. Sisi said he was in Kenya for a better deal over the use of the Nile in exchange for improved trade between the two countries.

Sisi's visit to Kenya was the first by an Egyptian president since Hosni Mubarak visited in 1984.

"Egypt and Kenya are bound together by the common artery of the River Nile and a long history of productive cooperation," he said.

"We will support development in the Nile Basin countries to optimise the use of this large Nile for the good of the Nile Basin countries in general."

Four months later, in June 2017, Sisi visited Kampala for the first-ever Nile Basin Summit organised by President Yoweri Museveni. He thanked Museveni for organising a "historical" event, noting that the move showed the people in the Nile Basin that "the River Nile unites us and does not separate us".

With perhaps the biggest delegation of all the member countries of the Nile Basin in attendance, Sisi said Egypt had participated in the summit to build trust with its partner states and establish a mechanism for prior notification aligning with international standards to ensure transparency over projects built on the Nile.

Egypt changes approach

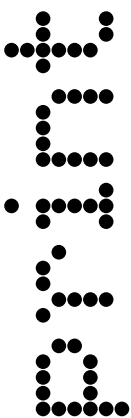
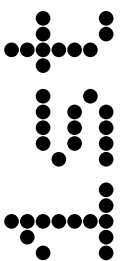
So why has Sisi opted to change tactics and move away from the days of Hosni Mubarak, who promised to protect "the waters of the Nile at all costs including using military intervention"?

Some experts say Sisi's change in approach over issues to do with the Nile started as soon as he took over power three years ago, preferring to show the upstream states that "the old era is gone and a new era is opened between the riparian states of the Nile and Egypt".

Within months of Sisi's presidency, Egypt effectively changed its decades-old policy, which consisted of retaining a monopoly on the use of the Nile waters, thanks to the generous 1959 Agreement.

Sisi immediately struck a more conciliatory tone, encouraging increased trade and investment with the rest of Africa and in favour of negotiations over the use of the River Nile waters.

On March 23, 2015, the leaders of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan met in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum. They reached a historic agreement on principles that would open the way



Let's put aside the issues we have with each other."

for broad regional cooperation on the use of the waters of the Nile.

Many saw the accord, signed by Sisi, by then Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn of Ethiopia and the by then President Omar al Bashir of Sudan, as having the potential to transform a longstanding dispute over the Nile.

"We have chosen cooperation and to trust one another for the sake of development," Sisi said after signing the accord.

Later, Sisi boarded a plane headed for Addis Ababa. He addressed the Ethiopian Parliament, telling them that "Egypt wants to turn the page in the history of relations between the two countries and establish a basis for mutual interest".

"Let's put aside the issues we have with each other. We need to work on joint responsibility," he said.

Observers say Sisi's rhetoric is different from his immediate predecessor, Mohamed Morsi, whose impassioned speech caught by television cameras in 2013 stopped short of declaring war against Ethiopia following the latter's unanimous decision to go ahead and build the multi-billion dollar Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).

Morsi and the other Egyptian leaders' "Big Brother" attitude has at times put Egypt on a collision course and ramped up tensions with the other nine independent countries in the Nile Basin, which have distinct interests in the river's waters.

Peter Pham, the Director of the US-based Atlantic Council's Africa Centre, noted in a recent paper that this had been the reason behind the tensions between the 11 independent countries in the Nile Basin.

So why then is Egypt, which has in the past chosen to bully and project an aggressive attitude towards its smaller and weaker upstream partners, talking of "mutual interest"?

George Barenzi, the dean at the School of Social Sciences at Nkumba University, told The Independent on August 17, 2017, that Sisi's pragmatism and military background have helped him see the reality of Egypt's "adversaries".

"In strategic terms, Sisi needed to rethink how best Egypt could utilise the River Nile, the very source of their livelihood in a manner that ensures that future prospects are guaranteed," he said.

Prof Sabiiti Makara, a professor of political science at Makerere University's Department of Political Education and Public Administration, also told The Independent that most of the upper riparian countries are gearing towards using the Nile waters much more than

they used to and, this is becoming an issue for the Egyptians.

"Sisi is only trying to see that Egypt gets a favourable deal," Makara said. "He is trying to negotiate the best way the upper riparian countries can use the Nile waters for their infrastructure but also ensure that they leave enough for Egypt which solely depends on the Nile for domestic water and irrigation."

Meanwhile, Henry Bazira, the Executive Director of the Water Governance Institute, a Kampala-based NGO, told The Independent that Sisi's approach is the correct move. Bazira said Egypt is perhaps beginning to realise that the 1929 and 1959 colonial agreements were never made in the interest of the citizens of the upper Nile states like Uganda and Ethiopia.

For decades, the upper riparian countries in the Nile Basin have been demanding talks on how the waters of the world's longest river can be used equitably.

In 2010, five upstream countries of the River Nile – Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania and Kenya signed the Cooperative Framework Agreement, which seeks to repeal the 1929 and 1959 colonial treaties, that gave Egypt and Sudan exclusive user rights over the River Nile waters.

The agreement, which outlines principles, rights and obligations for cooperation, management and development of the Nile Basin water resources, wants to amend the governing principles of managing the River Nile based on the international rivers, such as the fair and equitable use of water and harmlessness.

But Sudan and Egypt have repeatedly expressed concerns that electricity and irrigation projects could affect their historical share of the water in the River Nile. Egypt was granted 55.5 billion cubic metres and Sudan's 18.5 billion cubic metres.

Egypt has particularly been reluctant to sign away their rights related to the River Nile as the North African country already suffers from an annual deficit of 21.5 billion cubic metres.

The contested clause emphasised in the 1929 and 1959 agreements stipulates that countries in the upper Nile Basin should not use water to the detriment of the downstream nations.

That clause meant that countries like Uganda and Ethiopia could not construct hydroelectric dams and open big irrigation projects without getting consent from Sudan and Egypt, something the upstream countries have been trying to oppose.

In 2011, for instance, Ethiopia started building the 6,000 megawatts capacity Grand

Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile, one of the major tributaries that supply about 60 percent of the water that flows into the main River Nile – the primary source of water for close to 90 million Egyptians. Uganda is also building two more power dams at Isimba and Karuma for a combined capacity of 788 megawatts.

"The truth of the matter is that these countries have moved on and they can no longer be ruled by history, and so, it is maybe important for Egypt to agree with the members on how to manage the Nile because it is a resource for all the countries along it," Bazira told The Independent.

"Sisi is trying to negotiate for support from the upper riparian states which are in overwhelming support of the 2010 CFA," he said. "By visiting individual countries in the upper Nile, Sisi is trying to buy allies in Egypt's favour."

Barenzi also agrees with Bazira, saying Egypt seems to have realised that the 1929 and 1959 colonial agreements which mainly favoured Egypt and Sudan are no longer tenable.

"These (agreements) need to be revisited because events have overtaken them," Barenzi said.

For example, Barenzi said that when these agreements were signed, the upper riparian states were hardly populated, and the colonial power, Britain, governed many. He said these countries have since grown their populations, which has caused tremendous pressure on the environment adjacent to River Nile. Yet, the river needs an ecosystem that is well-preserved to the level of the period those colonial agreements were signed.

"If the people in the upper riparian countries cut down the trees and clear the vegetation around the river, the Nile will no longer retain the amount of water it had in the past. And even though the colonial agreements stipulate the do's and don'ts, the fact remains the water would reduce."

To preserve the integrity and water security that Egypt cherishes, Barenzi said, sustainably engaging the upper riparian states is a good move by Sisi.

"Egypt's involvement in the strategic stability of the riparian states could ensure that political conflicts do not affect the usage of the Nile waters," he said. "Most importantly, Sisi wants to ensure that Egypt is now taken as a colleague and not a domineering partner in the Nile Basin."



Ronald Musoke reports for The Independent in Kampala, Uganda. He was formerly a freelance reporter for The Sunrise, a contributing editor for the Green Chronicles magazine and a staff writer for EnviroConserve Africa. Ronald has already received several awards for his diverse work.



Sudan's flood: The raging river is a victim of the extreme climate

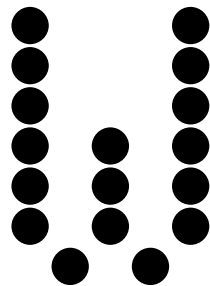
Flooded streets in Sudan's capital Khartoum, captured on August 4, 2013.
Photo: Flickr / Nafeer Sudan



On September 10, 2020, Adam Babakir's family woke up to the scene of water flowing under their beds and entering their home from every direction. Although they knew that the Blue Nile is flooding almost every year, they did not expect the flood to reach their home.

By Rehab Abd Almohsen,
Cairo, Egypt

Publication:
Scientific American, September 19, 2020



e inherited this house from our ancestors, and we have been living here for more than a hundred years, but it never happened before that floodwaters reached our house.”

His family left their home, and so did most of their neighbours, to reside in the nearby school buildings, leaving everything they owned behind.

Sennar State, located southeast of the capital, Khartoum, was among the most affected areas, as floods struck 16 out of 18 states in Sudan, according to Sudan's National Council for Civil Defense website.

The council estimated that 118 people died, 40,000 houses were destroyed entirely whilst an additional 60,000 were damaged, 6,950 heads of livestock were killed, and vast amounts of crops were destroyed due to the floods.

In Sudan's capital Khartoum, the Nile reached a “historical” level – nearly 18 metres – says Yasser Abbas, the Sudanese Minister of Irrigation and Water Resources.

In the press conference held on September 8, 2020, Abbas said the floods were caused by “heavy rainfall on the Ethiopian plateau” that feeds Lake Tana and the Blue Nile and the high water levels of Lake Victoria in Uganda that feeds the White Nile. As both arms of the Nile meet in Khartoum, the floods were foreseeable.

In May, Uganda announced that the water level in Lake Victoria increased by 1.32 metres within seven months, reaching a new record level. Meanwhile, 48,000 people living near Lake Tana were displaced in Ethiopia by floods described as “the worst in history”. However,

these warning signals didn't trigger any preparations to mitigate the effects of the impending disaster.

Abbas said, besides the high water volumes in both tributaries, Sudan also witnessed “large amounts of local rain”.

It all began in the Pacific Ocean

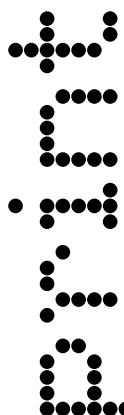
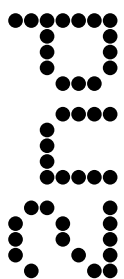
To understand the erratic and heavy rains across the region, one must look at the Pacific Ocean, explained Dr Modathir Zaroug, a Water Resources Modeller at the Nile Basin Initiative Secretariat: “The Pacific Ocean covers almost half of the globe.”

Two significant phenomena occur in the Pacific Ocean, Zaroug added: “When the Pacific Ocean temperature rises by more than half a degree Celsius, the El Niño warm phase kicks in, associated with droughts. If the temperature drops by the same amount, the La Niña phenomenon takes place, which is associated with the occurrence of floods.”

Although these climatic phenomena occur in the Pacific Ocean, they affect the climate and the rates of rain and humidity in different regions of the world.

The importance of understanding these phenomena, Zaroug said, is that it enables us to make a seasonal forecast of expected rain rates, whether in the lakes – specifically Lake Victoria – or in the Ethiopian plateau.

“Global bodies responsible for monitoring and tracking the climate are tracking the



••• I did not expect this flood to happen in this way.”

two phenomena, but there were no indications of the occurrence of the La Niña phenomenon this year. On the contrary, many models suggested the occurrence of El Niño, which means expected drought.”

Extreme weather conditions appear to be a recurring feature of the climate in Sudan. According to data from the National Meteorological Authority in 1984, the country was exposed to severe drought from May to October, while the situation reversed only four years later. In August 1988, Khartoum received abundant amounts of rain in a minimal time.

“Climate changes and the rise in global temperatures in general lead to waves of severe floods and long droughts, and the two waves are linked to the El Niño and La Niña phenomena,” Zaroug said.

The extreme floods

Elfatih Eltahir, Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and recipient of the 2017 Hydrological Sciences Prize, studied the relationship between the climate phenomena in the Pacific Ocean and the Nile River extensively.

In a study he published in 1996, he concluded that “25 percent of the natural fluctuation in the annual flow of the Nile is related to the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO).”

The study also showed that Nile water levels and the amount of rain in Sudan don't necessarily have to be related to the two phenomena. He noticed that the La Niña was intensely occurring in the ocean in some years, but the rain was low and vice versa.

But the link is the dominant feature in most cases. “In 2013, I conducted a study in which I concluded that if the El Niño phenomenon comes after La Niña, we will mostly witness a record level of flooding or what is called extreme flood,” Zaroug said.

He added that this is what happened in 1988 when El Niño ended and La Niña began. An extreme flood occurred. Also, the same situation occurred in 1998, 2007, 2010 and 2016 and 2020.

He also elaborated on the reasons behind the 2020 “historical flood” in Sudan and how the flood in the White Nile meets another surge in the Blue Nile, causing this considerable damage:

“It's a rare phenomenon that doesn't occur very often, and it will not be repeated soon. I did not expect this flood to happen in this way because even the global models did not

anticipate the phenomenon, as the expectations were that we would witness a severe rainy season, but not at this level. But the more close to flood season we were, the better and more accurate the forecast models were getting, and by the time it seemed clear that we are witnessing a big flood.”

What about the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)?

In July 2020, the Ethiopian government started the first stage of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) reservoir filling process, with approximately 5 billion cubic meters, without any coordination with the downstream countries.

In Egypt and Sudan, some voices accused the Ethiopian dam of doubling the effects of the 2020 floods. However, Dr Kevin Wheeler from the Environmental Change Institute at the University of Oxford said, “the link between the Renaissance Dam and the Sudan floods makes no sense. The volume captured was small, and the annual flow this year is large. Ever since it started overflowing, the flows into Sudan have been the natural runoff from Ethiopia”.

Wheeler indicated that “if people want to blame something, it's most likely another strong Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) phenomenon”, which occurs when the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea are exposed to high temperatures, increasing the amount of evaporation in the air. And with the wind, clouds form over Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan, and cause rain.

Ahmed Kamal, a researcher at the National Center for Water Research, agreed with Wheeler and said that the 2020 flood is not only related to the Pacific Ocean and its phenomena “it is possible that other elements affect the natural course of rains in eastern Africa, especially the monsoon and trade winds. They come from the Indian Ocean regularly in summer.

“This is in addition to another effect, the Atlantic winds, which are attracted towards the low-pressure range in central and northern Sudan, as they attract winds towards them from high-pressure areas on the Indian and Atlantic oceans, and cause summer rains to fall on Sudan from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ethiopian plateau.”

Kamal added: “These phenomena – when aggregated – could cause heavy rains and then massive floods across the Nile Basin.”

The situation in Egypt

Receiving the flood after Sudan, Egypt has prepared several plans to cope with the floods.

The first flood-defence line in Egypt is releasing the water stored in the High Aswan Dam Lake. The second one is to let the extra water go to the Toshka valley and keep it for the future.

Gamal Sayed Abdel Halim, a meteorological researcher in the Department of Climate Geography at Cairo University, said, “according to my expectation, the La Niña phenomenon this year will cause negative effects mostly on Iraq, the Gulf states, the Eastern Mediterranean region and parts of Egypt”.

According to Abdel Halim's estimates, there will be less rain in these countries, and the temperature will rise. “I expect that winter will be a bit later than normal and that the rains will be concentrated in October and November in Aswan, Luxor, the Red Sea cities and South Sinai.”



Rehab Abd Al-mohsen is a freelance science writer from Egypt's capital Cairo. Rehab writes for various publications, such as Nature Journal, Scientific American, SciDev.net and The Niles.



Villagers flee as 'gods of the lake' cross boundaries

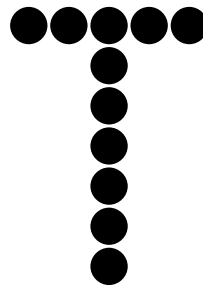
Flooded homes along Lake
Victoria in Kenya.
Photo: The Standard / Mactilda
Mbenywe



Sometime back in November 2015, a team of researchers warned that water levels in Lake Victoria were rising fast. The prophecy unfolds fast and furious as hundreds of families wake up to find the lake inside their houses five years later.

By Mactilda Mbenywe,
Nyanza, Kenya

Publication:
The Standard, March 5, 2020



The North Carolina State University's Department of Marine, Earth and Atmosphere Sciences report went largely unnoticed, apart from a story in Kenya's *The Sunday Standard*.

When this was predicted five years ago, many living on the lakeside either ignored it or dismissed it as global warming propaganda.

Investors continued to build hotels close to the lake. Villagers expanded their homesteads and farms next to the shores, oblivious to rising waters. And now the day of reckoning is here, and the lake is pushing back.

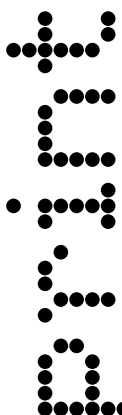
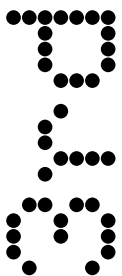
The water levels have been rising steadily in early 2020, creeping into several beach hotels and businesses. Homes were submerged, crops destroyed, and entire homesteads taken over by the lake's waters.

Villagers are fleeing in droves. The eldest among them say the last time the lake invaded their homes, in the same manner, was in 1963. That is 57 years ago.

Bewildered residents fear that "angry gods of the lake" launched a punitive offensive against them. "The lake is acting strange. I have never seen anything like this before," says Mary Achieng.

But experts say the lake's offensive has nothing to do with the gods and everything to do with climate change.

They say what the villagers face is a backflow, a situation where the balance between the lake's outflow and the inflow is tipped, primarily because of changing climate patterns, not just on the lake and the land around it but in the world beyond.



••• *The lake is acting strange.
I have never seen anything
like this before.*

“The result is that the lake starts discharging excess water into the land around it. In doing so, it is eroding shorelines, altering ecosystems, and causing flooding and economic damage,” says Raphael Kapiyo, an environmental scientist and a professor.

Humanitarian crisis

The result is a humanitarian and economic crisis that is rapidly unfolding along the shores of Lake Victoria – one that has affected Kisumu, Migori, Homa Bay and Siaya counties.

Around Dunga Beach in the outskirts of Kisumu, the lake’s waters invaded farms and playing fields. Heavy waves were pounding the walls of several beachfront hotels.

Professor Emeritus at the North Carolina State University’s Marine, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences Department, Fredrick Semazzi, said Lake Victoria would replenish its waters at an almost unprecedented rate, leading to an abrupt rise in water levels.

Semazzi warned that the swift, unexpected resurgence would lead to the destruction of property and that the rising waters would hit climate-sensitive sectors, including power generation, roads, general construction and businesses near the Lake.

Although it was earlier believed that heavy rains might have contributed to the rising water levels in the lake, the changes have continued even after the rains subsided.

Villagers and traders in parts of Usigu in Siaya and Kabonyo Kanyagwal in Nyando were counting losses after the lake’s waters submerged their homes, farms, shops and eateries.

Observers say more than 1,600 acres of land under crop were destroyed and more than hundreds of families displaced. Fleeing villagers were camping on higher grounds, anxiously watching as the lake’s waters continued to advance.

“We fear that the places we have taken refuge in will be submerged too, as each day the volume of the lake extends by at least 10 metres,” said George Ogada, an assistant chief.

The worst hit was Kanyagilo, Kahuu, Kudungo, Kamira and Kadidi villages in Nyando sub-county, where more than 600 households were marooned, causing significant displacement.

Here, scores of families pitched camp at Kanyagilo Dispensary, while others took refuge in homes of those living on higher grounds.

Weeks later, the waters were still advancing, reclaiming large swathes of land around the lake, sometimes forcibly. “For the last three

months, families have been staying awake as waves from the lake pound the villages at night,” says Mr Ogada.

Entire villages were staring at hunger after losing crops and livestock. Hungry and cold, they accused the national and county governments and humanitarian organisations of not paying attention to their suffering.

“Families are suffering. Women, men and children need food because their harvest has gone with the lake,” Lazarous Oketch, a village elder, said.

Schools weren’t spared. Most learners at Kandaria Primary and Secondary did not report back after being rendered homeless, and the lake’s waters took over their classrooms.

The spectre of waterborne diseases also loomed more prominent every day as the advancing lake took over clean water wells and tanks that stood in its way.

“We don’t have drinking water since the tanks have emptied into the lake. The wells that we depend on for clean water have been filled with dirty lake water,” Oketch added.

Like the villagers living around it, the lake’s advance seems to have caught the government flatfooted. Kisumu County Commissioner Susan Waweru led senior government officials to tour affected areas to assess the damage.

“We want to assess the situation and see what help the residents may require,” said Ms Waweru.

Another ignored warning

On July 16, 2016, a year after the scientists warned about Lake Victoria’s advance, the then Executive Director of the Nile Basin Initiative, Dr John Rao Nyaoro, told Uganda’s Observer that the lake’s water levels were growing unstable. Dr Nyaoro blamed it on climate change.

But for hundreds of displaced villagers who do not understand the concept of climate change and how it can so drastically affect their lives overnight, the gods may be to blame for the lake’s recent ‘strange’ behaviour.



Since August 2017, Mactilda Mbenywe has been a reporter for The Standard Group in Kisumu, Kenya. Before joining the Standard Group, she worked as a journalist with the Nation Media Group.



A few words with Rehab Abd Almohsen

Rehab Abd Almohsen during
the Nile Media Awards
ceremony in Addis Ababa,
Ethiopia.
Photo: NBI / Elizabeth Agiro



Rehab Abd Almohsen, an Egyptian science journalist, based in Cairo, took home three prizes from the Nile Media Awards ceremony this year, in the categories of Digital, Print and the Best Female Entry.

By Elzahraa Jadallah,
Khartoum, Sudan

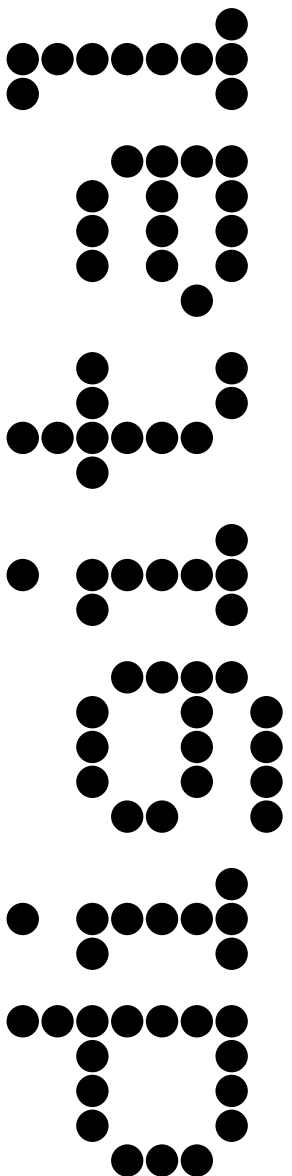
Her winning stories chronicle the impact of the filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and analyse the flooding in Sudan and its relation to the global climate crisis.


In an interview, she said that a highlight of winning was reading the line on her certificate that praises “balanced reporting”, something she has always prioritised when writing.

“I was very happy, and it was a joyful surprise for me to get awarded in three categories,” she said, adding that she was delighted to be recognised for giving people a voice and reporting an important story.

On being a science journalist

“I have loved writing since I was in school. I always was curious and asked lots of questions. However, I never thought I would be a journalist and wanted to be a doctor like my dad. That didn’t work out, and journalism came along. After all, reading and writing had always been





For journalists, succeeding in writing balanced stories alone deserves an award.”

heaven for me. Now I feel that this is what I was meant to do all along”.

Journalism, in general, is a challenging profession, and to be a journalist in a third world country and reporting on regional issues means overcoming many obstacles. But Rehab is up to the challenge. “The issue I often face is gaining the trust of experts and scientists – who sometimes have experienced being misquoted by the press – but that’s usually solved with credible reporting.”

Working as a female journalist has not posed many hurdles to Rehab. “I can’t think of a time I was discriminated against or treated differently for being a woman,” she said. Yet the main challenge for her, and many other working mothers, is caring for her son when she has to travel for work, which she often does.

Rehab acknowledges the need for more female journalists in the region. She thinks that a female reporter would cover many issues with a gender aspect more effectively.

“Issues like sanitation or water scarcity in less privileged areas, and the struggle of women to access water for household use is very different from men’s struggles. Another example is traditional agriculture practised by women who also have other domestic responsibilities. Those issues are viewed differently by female journalists and reported with a better view on the full human story”.

Balanced reporting

Rehab started working on water-related issues in 2011 when she wrote an article tackling data limitations on water issues in the Arab region. The case gripped her from the onset: “I highlighted the lack of data and how is it treated as a national security matter. When I went home that day, I told my mother that I want to be a science journalist specialising in water reporting.”

She then started to focus on environmental issues, and in 2013 she began investigating

topics related to the GERD. By following the studies and the updates about the dam, she produced many balanced and scientific-based articles over the years, making her one of the most distinguished water reporters in Egypt today.

“I know journalists often have national concerns and political views, but it’s important to put those aside while covering transboundary issues. For journalists, succeeding in writing balanced stories alone deserves an award.”

Probing the truth, unravelling lies

As a journalist devoted to fighting misinformation, it was fake news that initially motivated her to write her first winning story regarding the impact of the GERD on Sudan and Egypt. At the time, many reports were linking the floods and water shortages in the Blue Nile in Sudan with the second filling of the GERD, so she started searching for the truth and interviewing scientists from the three states: “I wanted to write a story that puts things into a scientifically credible perspective,” she said.

“After publishing the story, many people from the three countries shared it, indicating that it reflected all viewpoints. The story was the most read on the website for many months, and the international union of scientific journalists shared it. I really care about this while reporting Nile Basin issues. I try to write stories that a reader can’t guess the nationality of the writer when reading them.”

Her second award-winning story was to raise awareness of the causes of the flooding disaster of 2020 in Sudan. It was part of a series investigating the reasons behind the floods and showcasing its linkage to the international climate crisis.

Reporting on the Nile

By reporting Nile Basin issues regularly, Rehab communicated with all parties involved in different topics: scientists, experts, politicians, and people from the civil society in the different Nile Basin countries. That process highlighted a severe problem.

“There’s a lack of cooperation in our region: internal cooperation within each of the Nile Basin states, between the various governmental institutions, as well as between the different countries. We need mutual think-tanks that leverage scientific research that enlightens us regarding the future of the region,” she said.

She thinks that the media in the region needs to address the Nile Basin nations together, not just as individual local and national platforms. From her travels to many states across the region, she noticed that people from different countries are keen to learn more about their neighbours. This need should be addressed through cooperation and international media outlets that build bridges among Nile Basin people.

“We need our media to steer away from political, nationalistic speech and isolation and go towards science-based and balanced reporting. That will forge a sense of togetherness and collaboration. Media houses and journalists need capacity building and training in this regard,” she said, adding that employing the essential tools of journalism can help, such as representing all the views and avoiding bias, especially on transboundary issues.

But balanced reporting is not only the job of journalists, Rehab said, rather scientists and researchers also need to cooperate with the media to fight fake news and eradicate politicised reporting.

Ethiopia dam filling impact ‘limited’ – if no drought

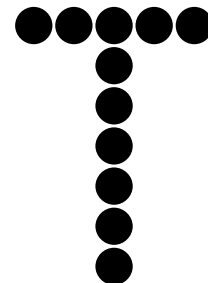
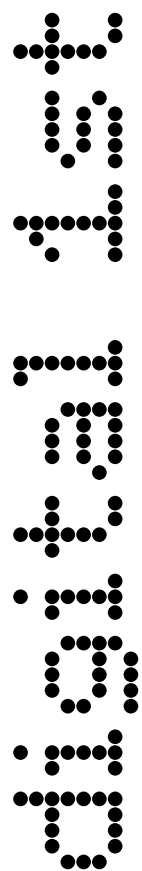
An automatic sprinkler for
potato crops near Cairo, Egypt.
Photo: IWMI / Hamish John
Appleby



Analysis suggests that Egypt’s River Nile water supply will only be threatened by filling the upstream Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in the case of prolonged drought.

By Rehab Abd Almohsen,
Cairo, Egypt

Publication:
SciDev.Net, June 27, 2020




he dam, and ongoing negotiations over its filling and future operation, has sparked conflict between Ethiopia and downstream states Sudan and Egypt, which say they fear the giant Blue Nile hydropower dam could alternately cause water scarcity and flooding in their countries.

Data analysis shows that Egypt will not be severely affected by the first stage of the filling of the dam, said Peter Hany, a professor of irrigation and hydraulics at Egypt’s Ain Shams University.

“In the case of an abundance of water, or a sudden flood that necessitates the release of large quantities of water, it is possible that the Sudanese dams will not bear this pressure and will collapse,” said Mohamed Dawoud, National Center for Water Research in Egypt.

However, a decline of five billion cubic metres in Egypt’s share of Nile River waters – about 12.5 percent of what Egypt says is its minimum need – could lead to the loss

Best Female Entry:
Rehab Abd Almohsen was recognised
as “Best Female Entry” at the Nile
Media Awards 2021.

 *Any agreement is better than
no agreement.”*

of 42,000 hectares of agricultural land,
Hany warned.

Heavy rains in 2020 mean the first filling
stage is already complete, Ethiopia’s Prime
Minister said after an extraordinary meeting
between the three states in July 2020.

Sudan reported in June 2020 that it had
recorded a significant drop in water levels
along its sections of the Nile.

The African Union called the summit to
progress stalled political, legal and technical
negotiations and arrive at a comprehensive
operational agreement for the dam.

Hany said beginning the filling process
in 2020 rather than in 2021 was the better
option. Water levels at the time were high
in Egypt’s Lake Nasser, which fills from the
Nile and provides water for agriculture and
energy production.

A seven-year filling schedule had been
tentatively agreed as a result of a series of
negotiations that began in December 2019.
Still, Ethiopia has been pushing for a four-
year plan to expedite its energy production.

Seleshi Bekele, Ethiopia’s Minister of
Water, Irrigation and Energy, said the release
of water would remain above the historical
29 billion cubic metre flow. Egypt wants
Ethiopia to commit to a minimum of 40 billion
cubic metres of water.

“By following this schedule, the possible
range of water release is between 31 and 43
billion cubic meters during the seven years,
at 80 percent probability,” Bekele told a virtual
seminar held by the Ethiopian Embassy in
South Africa in June 2020.

“The schedule clearly shows for the first
time the filling pattern, which includes six
stages, the last of which is estimated at 14
billion cubic meters,” Hany said.

Hany used this data to create a mathematical
model to determine the impact of filling Ethio-
pia’s reservoir on Egypt’s Aswan High Dam
and the water level in its reservoir, Lake Nasser.

Hany found that if the schedule is main-
tained, the impact during filling would be
limited, except in periods of prolonged drought.

The Nile Basin states agreed to separate
scientific and technical negotiations from the
political and legal issues at the extraordinary
meeting. Dates in 2020 needed yet to be set
for future sessions.

Also downriver from the hydropower
structure, Sudan fears Ethiopia’s dam will
impact its hydroelectric installations. The
Nile countries have constructed a series of
dams along its length – known as cascading
dams or reservoirs – and river flow fluctuations
caused by upstream dams can significantly
affect downstream dams.

Sudan’s Minister of Water Resources
and Irrigation, Yasir Abbas, said he feared
a lack of coordination and data exchange
from Ethiopia.

Mohamed Dawoud, a professor of water
resources at the National Center for Water
Research in Egypt, said that Sudan’s dams
are at risk of being severely harmed in the
absence of a binding agreement.

“The Sudanese dams are relatively small,”
Dawoud said. “In the case of an abundance
of water or a sudden flood that necessitates
the release of large quantities of water, it is
possible that the Sudanese dams will not bear
this pressure and collapse.”

Environmental conflict expert Ashok
Swain, from Uppsala University’s Research
School of International Water Cooperation,
said the African Union is best placed to play
the role of mediator in Nile negotiations.

“Any agreement is better than no agree-
ment, as no one is expecting a comprehensive
basin-based water resource development
agreement taking place among the three
riparian countries soon,” Swain said.



Rehab Abd Al-
mohsen is a free-
lance science writer
from Egypt’s capital
Cairo. Rehab writes
for various publica-
tions, such as Nature
Journal, Scientific
American, SciDev.net
and The Niles.



Karangura: Caught between the COVID-19 pandemic and a water crisis

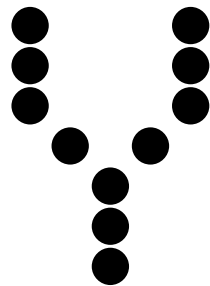
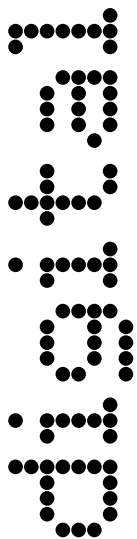
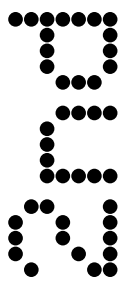
And elderly woman washes hands
in Kazingo trading centre.
Photo: InfoNile / Alex Ashaba



Uganda's National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) has over 10,000 water connections (households) in Fort Portal city alone. At times, consumers complain of the chocolate colour of the tap water pumped into their homes, especially during the rainy season when it gets contaminated upstream.

By Felix Basiime,
Kampala, Uganda

Publication:
Daily Monitor, July 16, 2020



Young girls are getting pregnant. Domestic violence is on the rise. These are just some of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions in an area where water is scarce, says Kikora Masereka, of Kyahwire zone, Karangura Sub County in Kabarole District of Western Uganda.

"The challenge we have got during the lockdown due to COVID-19 is increased pregnancies due to young girls walking long distances to fetch water at far water sources," Masereka said.

"Previously men and women have been fetching the water, but now due to schools' closure, parents send their children to water sources, and boys have taken advantage of that," he adds.

"We are now starting a dry season (June to August); we are going to face a lot of challenges of domestic violence because of long queues at water sources. It will force women who fetch water more than men to delay at water sources. And usually, men think that they were not at the water sources but had gone for other men," he added.

Chris Tumuranzye, the village leader (LC1 chairperson) for the Kyahwire zone, says he is facing many challenges leading a community that is both stressed by a lack of water and at risk of COVID-19.

He said more than 6,000 residents in the area scramble for water at two sources that serve four zones. He says others who are scared of the crowds and queues are

forced to walk over one and a half kilometres to fetch water from River Mpanga.

"The government tells us to stay at home, but we have to walk to water sources where there are no sanitisers at the taps," Kikora Masereka, a resident, says.

People are forced to crowd at boreholes and shallow wells. Thereby, no social distancing is observed, an essential requirement to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Karangura, with a population of 12,368, is the source of River Mpanga that snakes through Kabarole, Fort Portal City, Kyenjojo, Kamwenge and Kitagwenda districts before it empties into Lake George. The upstream part of the river is highly contaminated. Lake George connects to Lake Edward through the 40-kilometre Kazinga channel, and Lake Edward is connected to Lake Albert through River Semuliki before they connect to River Nile.

"We have a gravity flow scheme that supplies only two wells that serve four zones; Kazingo (Bukuuku sub-county), Katuuru (Mugusu sub-county), Katuuru Upper (Karangura) and Kyahwire (Karangura). There is always a scramble for water at these sources, and kids are beaten. This has created bad blood between women as they fight due to the long queues. So we want the government to avail us more water sources," says Tumuranzye. "We have tried to teach the people of this area to avoid COVID-19 by using clean water for drinking, water at the toilets, washing hands all the time and wearing face masks, but it is a challenge amid a water crisis."

Vincent Mugumya, a resident of Karangura, says the people in his area have no safe water for consumption since their water is either stagnant or originates from shallow open wells.

“In the hills, it is very rocky, while the water table is high in lower areas. So people dig very shallow latrines and faeces mix with water, which means the people downstream drink contaminated water,” Mugumya says.

Contamination of water sources

Maureen Kajumba, the acting sub-county chief of Karangura, says the issue has worsened by the widespread trend of open defecation.

“Most families spend the whole day up in the hills in their shambas digging from morning to evening and even have their breakfast and lunch from there. So what do you expect after eating,” she says. “In the gardens, there are no toilets, and they dig very far away from their homes, so when it rains, the floods and landslides sweep the waste in the river and other water sources.”

“All the gravity flow schemes are contaminated, and I am scared that since Karangura feeds the entire region, because the source of river Mpanga is here, it is not only us who will be affected but the entire population of the Kabarole district downstream,” she says.

The long-standing issue of water scarcity has multiple competing causes in the region. Mr Mwesige Fenehansi, the LC 1 chairperson for Nyarukanga village in Karangura, is trying to address the problem by mobilising all LC 1 chairpersons to organise all households in the sub-county in groups of ten model households, which will begin communal cleanup of each home, including setting up standard latrines. This requires a comprehensive approach from many stakeholders, district leaders said.

Olive Tumuhairwe, the District Health Inspector for Kabarole district, says Karangura has about 79 percent latrine coverage. Still, less than 10 percent have improved sanitation facilities, which are safe and clean.

“The sanitation and hygiene coverage in this area is not so good because we have a majority of the structures which are temporary and those that compromise the environment and water safety,” Tumuhairwe says.

According to the Kabarole District Wash Master Plan 2018-2030, access to water services is low (58 percent) and is less than the national average estimated at 70 percent at the time.

The district master plan indicated a high level of contamination of drinking water sources (64 percent) especially in rural areas. This compromises the quality of water for domestic use.

The adoption of hand-washing with soap at the household level is very low, and less than ten percent of households had improved sanitation facilities with hand-washing facilities with water and soap.

Since hand washing helps to stay the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a high chance of the communities becoming infected with COVID-19 if transmission climbs in the region.

Geological challenges

According to the district chairman, Richard Rwabuhinga, loamy soils composed mainly of sand and silt with a small amount of clay have made it impossible for engineers to build Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) structures. These soils make up about 70 percent of the district and have caused the community to lose money on collapsed latrines.

Tumuhairwe says that in Harugongo sub-county, pozzolana rocks made of volcanic material have also made it hard to dig pit latrines.

The high water table in areas such as Karago town council, Karangura and Bukuuku also make constructing latrines difficult. The waste can quickly enter groundwater or run into rivers and streams when they flood, Tumuhairwe says. A water table is a level at which underground soil and gravel are entirely saturated with water. The water table is generally higher in areas with high-density soil related to clay content.

Chris Amanyire, a Field Officer with Natural Resources Defense Initiatives (NRDI), says to solve sanitation issues in areas with a high water table, they promote eco-san toilets.

Eco-san toilets work without water, separating urine from faeces and recycling waste by turning the waste into compost or liquid fertiliser, which can be used to fertilise soil or crops.

“We just open the surface and start construction... The household contributes UGX 700,000, and NRDI pays the balance of UGX 2.3 million,” Amanyire says. NRDI also runs a community project of planting trees along River Mpanga and provides free seedlings to the community.

Rita Kiteme, a social scientist with the Ministry of Water and Environment, says that issues identified in Karangura include a high level of erosion because of the gradient of hilly areas.

“This has caused siltation of the river due to human activities cultivating close to River Mpanga, so Albert Water Management Zone focused on homes in Karangura because it is upstream of River Mpanga,” she says.

The ministry has done some community training in technologies that could minimise erosion issues, such as constructing rainwater harvesting trenches and formulating contours where the gradients are very steep.

“After two years, NWSC in Fort Portal has been able to report that the water is a bit better,” she says.

Water treatment at the NWSC plant in Fort Portal had tripled in the previous years, as they used more chemicals to purify the water of contamination, according to the NWSC Fort Portal branch manager, Denis Muramuzi.

Muramuzi says it is costly to filter the polluted water from River Mpanga because it requires many chemicals.

“Between 2010 to 2016, the chemical consumption at NWSC Fort Portal plant increased by 3.1 times from 0.0120 kilogrammes/unit of water to 0.0375 kilogrammes/

unit of water treated,” he says. “It is all due to the increasing pollution levels on River Mpanga, which serves as our source of raw water supplying Fort Portal and Kabarole District,” he adds.

NWSC has over 10,000 water connections (households) in Fort Portal city alone. At times, consumers complain of the chocolate colour of the tap water pumped into their homes, especially during the rainy season due to the contamination upstream.

Community attitude

Lydia Mutiibwa, a Senior Environment Health Officer with the Ministry of Water and Environment, attached to rural water and sanitation in the Western region, says that the residents of Karangura face a significant challenge of washing hands despite knowing the dangers and being taught what to do.

“Here people have been taught to wash hands, but you find someone has a toilet, but no water or some have water without soap, some have soap but no water yet hand-washing in totality stops most diseases including coronavirus. You find five out of the 20 households we visited were able to do proper hand-washing. The rest know the importance of hand-washing, but behavioural change is wanting, so they don’t practice it,” she says.

The district health inspector Tumuhairwe says the district has been holding a community awareness campaign throughout last year to improve hygiene and sanitation in the area.

Water coverage in Kabarole District

According to the Kabarole District water officer, Bruno Basude, the status of water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion (2018/19), water coverage was 80 percent while the functionality of water sources was at 88 percent, the functionality of water committees 41 percent and latrine coverage at 81 percent.

Hand-washing facilities at the household level were at 28 percent in 2018/19, hand washing facilities at schools at 14 percent, pupil: stance ratio at 65:1, household sanitation at 85 percent, about 171 (35 percent) villages without a water source and 323 villages (65 percent) with a water source.

The waterborne toilets account for only one percent of the facilities.

According to the Water Supply Atlas, the access rates in Kabarole vary from seven percent in the Kijura town to 95 percent in Bukuuku sub-county. Kabarole has 1,137 domestic water points, which serve 258,053 people – 178,127 in rural areas. About 207 water points have been non-functional for over five years and are considered abandoned. Kabarole has three piped schemes.

[This story was produced in partnership with InfoNile with support from Code for Africa and funding from the Pulitzer Center and National Geographic Society.]



Felix Basiime worked with Monitor Publications as the Western Regional Bureau Chief in Fort Portal, Uganda. He worked for the Monitor from 2002 to June 2021 and received several awards for his journalistic work.

Obituary: Mourning Felix Basiime

The entire MiCT The Niles team is deeply saddened and shocked that our friend and colleague Felix Basiime has passed away.

The 58-year old husband and father of four died of a COVID-19 infection on Friday morning, June 18, 2021. Felix’s byline remains a testament to excellent journalism. Our sincere condolences go to his family, friends and colleagues.



Are you more of a number or a word person?

The Niles Media Awards 2021 in numbers, plus some words from the partners and sponsors.

“

I call upon Nile Basin journalists to distribute the knowledge and information generated by NBI in a factual and balanced manner. It is only by doing so that you will promote constructive cooperation on the Nile.”

Dr Jeanne D'Arc Mujawamariya, Minister of Environment Rwanda

“

We hope that these awards will serve as a reminder that accurate and constructive reporting plays a key role in fostering positive relationships among the Nile Basin states and people.”

Prof Seifeldin Hamad Abdalla, former NBI Secretariat Executive Director

“

The Nile Media Awards serve to put constructive and high-quality journalistic stories into the spotlight. Media in Cooperation and Transition (MiCT) believes that this recognition will encourage even more and better reporting of Nile Basin affairs.”

Dirk Spilker, MiCT Head of Programmes

“

We are very happy to partner with the Nile Basin Initiative in the Nile Media Awards. We would like to congratulate all the journalists, photographers and communicators that they have been awarded. Let's keep doing the good job we are doing, all together.”

Emanuele Fantini, IHE Delft Senior Lecturer/Researcher

25

Journalists awarded for outstanding reporting on the Nile Basin

3

Awards received by Rehab Abd Almohsen in 2021

90+

Entries submitted across all categories

16,500
USD

Total of cash prizes awarded in 2021

7

Award categories: Print, Radio, Television, Digital, Photography, Best Collaborative Story and Best Female Entry

10

Partner organisations and institutions supported the Nile Media Awards 2021

3

Nile Media Awards editions already held (incl. 2021)

9

Jury members involved in the evaluation of all submissions

miCT

NILE BASIN INITIATIVE
INITIATIVE DU BASSIN DU NIL

IHE
DELFT
Global Partnership
for Water and
Development

SIWI

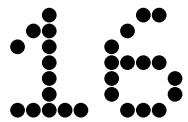
Global Water
Partnership
Eastern Africa

IWMI
International Water
Management Institute

InfoNile

Water Journalists
Africa

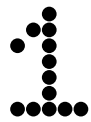
nile
basin
discourse
one Nile - one family



Evaluation criteria used to assess submissions



Average article length in words (Print Category)



Journalist attending the award ceremony
in Addis Ababa in person (due to COVID-19
restrictions)

“

We need to reach more people, especially the younger generations. Talking to them through a short video will help form a new vision for a more collaborative future in the Nile Basin.”

Amgad Elmahdi, IWMI Head of MENA Region Office

“

People around the world spend most of their time in front of their television sets. This creates a great opportunity for the production of more water and climate stories. This can only be done if the media are empowered and supported to report more objectively on water and climate-related issues.”

George Sanga, GWPEA Regional Coordinator

“

The digital category has seen the submission of contributions of exceptional quality that have made a lasting impact among the public and experts.”

Pavlos Ioannis Evangelidis, EU Delegation to Uganda Head of the Inclusive Green Economy Section

“

Through these awards, we can contribute towards breeding super journalists in the Nile Basin who are able to write stories that help millions to make informed decisions. We will always be part of these awards.”

Frederick Mugira, WJA Founder & InfoNile Co-Founder

“

This is already the second edition we are supporting, and that shows the great importance we attach to the media in informing the dialogue of countries and people across the basin.”

Dr Malte Grossmann, GIZ Head of Nile Projects

“

Recognising the importance of gender equality in journalism, the best female submission award was designed to elevate the voices and perspectives of women journalists working hard across the basin.”

Kerry Schneider, SIWI Programme Manager Shared Water Partnership

“

A constructive dialogue needs reliable and well-researched facts. In the Nile Basin, such a dialogue is key to building consensus in the region and finding solutions to ongoing challenges. It is in recognition of this role of the media that the German Federal Government supports these awards.”

Matthias Schauer, German Ambassador to Uganda



Nile dam dispute spills onto social media

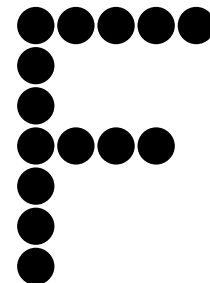
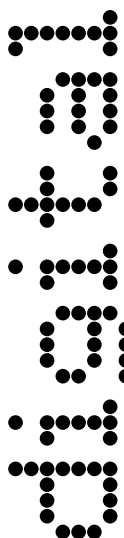
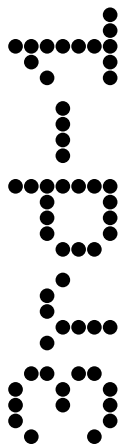
Men at work on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project.
Photo: Wikimedia Commons / Jacey Fortin



As Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan struggle to resolve a long-running dispute over Addis Ababa's mega-dam project on the Nile, some citizens are sparring online over their rights to the mighty waterway.

By Bassem Aboualabass,
Cairo, Egypt

Publication:
AFP, July 9, 2020



or nearly a decade, multiple rounds of talks between Cairo, Addis Ababa and Khartoum have failed to produce a deal over the filling and operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).

Anxiety has mounted in downstream Sudan and Egypt, fearing for their vital water supplies after upstream Ethiopia declared plans to start filling Africa's largest dam reservoir in July.

As tensions run high in the political arena, they have also been amped up online.

In one widely viewed video shared initially on TikTok, an Ethiopian woman pours water from a pitcher into two cups representing Egypt and Sudan.

She fills Sudan's cup to the brim but only pours a trickle of water into Egypt's before emptying the water back into the pitcher.

"This is my water. When I give you water, it's my call, not yours," she says.

In response, an Egyptian woman created a compilation of the video and one of her own in which she knocks down a dam-shaped block structure with the Ethiopian flag superimposed on it before triumphantly downing a cup of water.

Social media platforms are powerful, said Wubalem Fekade, Head of Social Development and Communication at the Eastern Nile Technical Regional Office (ENTRO) - Nile Basin

••• *It's easy to disseminate
unverified, incorrect and
false information."*

Initiative. "People on the social media platforms aren't accountable, so it's easy to disseminate unverified, incorrect and false information, even conspiracy theories," he said.

But, he added hopefully, "when used creatively and judiciously, they can help defuse tensions".

'Psychological war'

The online row over the dam has been particularly heated between Egyptian and Ethiopian social media users.

Egypt has long enjoyed the lion's share of the Nile water under decades-old agreements that were primarily viewed by other Nile Basin countries as unfair.

On Twitter, Egyptians echoed authorities' fears that Ethiopia's dam would severely cut their country's water supply from the Nile, which provides 97 percent of the arid nation's water needs.

"We will never allow any country to starve us" of water, Egyptian billionaire Naguib Sawiris wrote on Twitter.

"If Ethiopia doesn't come to reason, we, the Egyptian people, will be the first to call for war," he threatened.

Egyptian cartoonist Ahmed Diab has weighed in with a drawing of an outsized Egyptian soldier, rifle slung over his shoulder, facing a diminutive Ethiopian man with the dam in the background.

"You idiot, try to understand that I care for you... ever heard about the Bar-Lev Line," the soldier tells the Ethiopian, alluding to Egypt's military strength in referring to the Egyptian destruction of an Israeli defence line along the Suez canal in 1973.

Diab called the cartoon part of a "psychological war".

"Besides a show of military might and strong media discourse, arts can boost people's morale," he said.

For their part, Ethiopians have rallied behind their country's mega project, set to become Africa's largest hydroelectric installation.

On social media, they have rejected any conditions of reaching a deal before filling the dam.

Filling the dam should not be held "hostage" to an agreement with Cairo, Ethiopian activist Jawar Mohamed wrote on Twitter.

"If agreement is reached before the filling begins in the coming days, it's great. If not, the filling should begin, and the negotiation shall continue," he said.

One of Africa's fastest-growing economies, Ethiopia insists the dam will not affect the onward flow of water and sees the project as indispensable for its national development and electrification.

'Healthy discussions'

Khartoum hopes the dam will help regulate flooding, but in June, it warned that millions of lives would be at "great risk" if Ethiopia unilaterally fills the dam.

In a letter to the United Nations Security Council, Sudan raised concerns that water discharged from the GERD could "compromise the safety" of its Roseires Dam by overwhelming it and causing flooding.

Omar Dafallah, a Sudanese artist, depicted Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed overseeing the water flowing from the dam through a faucet to fill a jug held by Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok.

The drawing also shows Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi with a large water container waiting in line.

In June 2020, Egypt also appealed to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to intervene in the crisis – a move Sisi said underlined his country's commitment to a political solution.

Egyptian lawmaker Mohamed Fouad views the online debate as a way to "break the stalemate" in the diplomatic talks, "so long as they remain within the boundaries of healthy discussions".



Bassem Abo Alabass is a correspondent for Agence France-Presse (AFP) in Cairo, Egypt. Until May 2017, he worked as Economy-Editor for Al-Ahram Online.



Shrinking fish population in Lake Victoria: Kenyans turn to Uganda and China for supplies

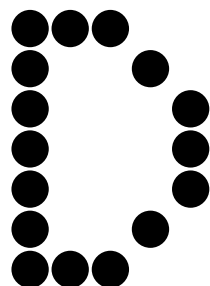
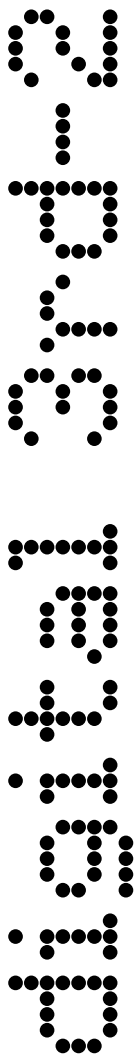
With fish becoming scarce, this woman has only a few for sale.
Photo: Talk Africa / Pius Sawa



Lake Victoria in East Africa is the second largest freshwater body in the world, and is shared by Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Today, the water resource is under immense pressure. Climate change has already increased the lakes water temperature, reducing the number and diversity of fish.

By Pius Sawa,
Kisumu, Kenya

Publication:
Talk Africa, April 8, 2020



Richard Munang, Regional Climate Change Coordinator, United Nations Environment Programme UNEP, says climate change has been responsible for the drastic fluctuations in rainfall patterns across Africa. Kenya has experienced frequent famine cycles that have resulted in increased drought frequency, hence increased water scarcity, impacting river and lake fisheries and aquaculture.

“With climate change comes the warming of the atmosphere. Africa is the fastest-warming region of the globe. Twenty of the fastest-warming countries globally are in Africa. In a sample of 30 African countries, two-thirds or over 60 percent of them are warming faster than the globe, and the trend is projected to continue in the coming decades. The signs of this warming are apparent even in Kenya. Only ten of the 18 glaciers that covered Mount Kenya’s summit a century ago remain.

It is projected that within the next 25 years, warming temperatures will deplete all the remaining ice on Mount Kenya. Warming then means warmer lakes which then depletes oxygen levels in the water. Warm water means fish need more oxygen to perform daily activities, like feeding, breeding etc. This then reduces both their numbers as well as affecting their distribution as fish may move to less warm areas of this transboundary water resource.”

Dr Munang also cites human activities – including encroachment, pollution and degradation of the lake and its immediate surrounding as contributing to the degenera-

tion of the lake and what is referred to as its riparian ecosystem. “Degrading the riparian ecosystem means erosion in the surrounding area ends up as siltation in the river. Pollution encourages the growth of invasive weeds like the hyacinth, which reduce oxygen levels and kill off fish. With weakened ecosystems, the lake becomes even more susceptible to the damage of climate change. This becomes a vicious cycle.”

At Dunga, the entire beach is submerged, restaurants and fish stores are only accessible through metallic bridges and old car tyres. Most boats lie dormant. There is not much activity, despite it being Friday, a day when most people flood the lakeside for fun. Women with plastic basins are sitting in a hall, which is actually a fish collection and weighing area. The aluminium iron tables are empty. One boat arrives after another at 20-minute intervals. A group of women head towards the ship to get the fish, while the rest wait for their specific ships to dock.

“Years back, you could come here in the morning and pick as much fish as you want and go home. But that is not the case these days. You have to fight for the fish. There is no fish in the lake,” says Annah Anyango, who is in her 70s and has been selling fish for the last 30 years.

She is lucky to get half a basin of cut fish and not the common tilapia or Nile perch. With more than 11 orphans to look after, Annah is worried about the future. “I used to make up to 3,000 Kenyan Shilling (about USD 30), but

It is easier to get the Chinese fish.”

today I can only make around KES 700 (USD 7) or less in a day. I educated my children through fish selling, but now I have orphans to feed and educate as well. Life is hard.”

Pamela Achieng, a mother of eight from the Manyata Estate, has been selling fish since 2008, but her life has totally changed. “In 2008, the fish business was good. You could get a good profit to enable you to meet other needs, like paying school fees and feeding the family. The fish is always plentiful from April to August. But look, now there is nothing. I don’t know if the water is now too much, and that has caused the fish to disappear?”

With the worsening situation, many fishermen like Maurice Otieno opted to divert to other income-generating activities. Maurice now does the bodaboda business, carrying passengers on his motorbike within Kisumu city. It is now three years since he abandoned fishing, and he does not regret it.

“I used to be a fisherman, but I started doing bodaboda due to the lack of fish. I know fishing very well, but it was not paying. I don’t know if the fish migrated or what is the problem.”

Not only Maurice but many fishermen have opted to leave the lake for other businesses like farming. Joyce Atieno Otieno has been selling fish at Dunga beach for fifteen years, and he has seen men running away from the fishing business.

“I can’t compare the years back then and today. Today the fish is scarce, and the fishermen are few because many have gone back to their villages and have vacated the houses they used to rent near the lake for fear that the situation will get worse in the future. So you get that everything has gone down. If you get the little amount of fish, the price is up, and when you increase the price for your clients, they complain.”

The earliest the fishermen return from the deep end to the shore is in the afternoon, a journey they begin at 4:00 AM. The women start picking the fish as late as 3:00 PM, expecting to sell to their customers at around 6:00 PM. But with the curfew imposed by the government amid the coronavirus, the fish business is becoming even more challenging.

“We depend on workers who leave their jobs at around 6:00 PM. Then they start coming to eat fish from around 7:00 to 9:00 PM. But because of the coronavirus, the little fish you get is not eaten. The moment you expect clients to start coming, the curfew begins, and police are chasing everyone away. You find that the little stock you could once sell in one day now takes three days. But people want fresh fish,” says Joyce.

She says almost 95 percent of women depend on fishing for a living. “They depend on fish to educate their children, feed their families and pay house rent. Very few women here have husbands who can support them. I have educated all my children from selling fish.”

Sourcing fish from Uganda and China

Most of the women who sell fish from the lake are not aware of the fish imported from China, flooding the market in Kenya. They say they share the little they get from the fishermen. Maurice is aware of the imported fish, saying fish from China is in solid supply in Kisumu city and other parts of the country.

“The tilapia type of fish from China is the most sold here in Kisumu because Nile Perch, the best fish here, is scarce. It is not plentiful because the lake no longer produces enough.”

Data compiled by the State Department of Fisheries indicate that the value of fish imported from China in 2018 increased by 11.8 percent to KES 1.7 billion in 2018. Kenya shipped in 22,362 tonnes of fish, up from 19,127 tonnes imported in 2017.

In Kakamega town, however, things are different. The fish business depends much on stocks from China and neighbouring Uganda. At Kambi Somali fish market, Florence Makokha Onyango, the chairperson of the fish sellers at the market, says that since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, fish from China is no longer available.

“The Kenyan fish is in high demand and is very expensive. But the fish from China has been boosting our business because they make us maintain the supply to our clients. It is easier to get the Chinese fish, as you just send the money to the factory and a truck delivers the fish.”

With only six percent of Lake Victoria in Kenya, Uganda’s 42 percent has become a significant seller to Kenya, but at a cost. Yvonne Khayechia from Amalemba in Kakamega has never sold fish from China and has been getting her supplies from Busia in Uganda.

“I used to get fish from Kisumu, but it is no more. I think it is due to climate change and overfishing, leading to fish in the lake disappearing. I get my supplies from Busia, Uganda, and it is a challenge. You have to fight for the fish. You must catch the earliest vehicle to Busia and reach the market before the Ugandan sellers bring the fish to the

border market. At times you miss it and come back without.”

With the coronavirus pandemic, the situation has become worse for Yvonne and other traders who travel to Busia. “Uganda closed the border, so no more fish comes to Kenya. Or if it comes, getting it is a challenge,” says Florence.

The high cost of transport increased fish prices, and fish sellers like Yvonne have to increase the price of fish, which causes conflict with her clients. “Everything from transport, cooking oil and the fish price is high. So you are forced to make a profit, but many of the clients will not understand. The business has slowed down.”

Abandoning fish selling could be a quick decision for the women around Lake Victoria and Kakamega. However, it is hard for them to start a new business. “If you feel like closing the fish business, and you have responsibilities and dependants, it becomes a problem. But if you had a way out, you could abandon it given that the profit is little as compared to years back when we used to get plenty of supplies from the lake,” says Yvonne.

Florence has a suggestion for the government about boosting the fish population in Lake Victoria. “According to the fishermen, the fish population decline has been caused by too much fishing and the water hyacinth. If the government can find a way of eradicating that weed, it can help. You know we are used to this business. Starting a new business is like giving birth to a new baby and taking care of it until it matures. If the government can help restock the lake, we can continue with our business. After all, fish is food, and as you know, some people have been advised by doctors to stop eating red meat and to eat fish.”

In addition, reducing post-harvest fish losses, providing alternative livelihoods for communities living near the lake and increasing policy coherence across different sectors are some of the solutions that Dr Munang suggests in addressing the fate of Lake Victoria.



Pius Sawa Murefu is a multimedia journalist based in Nairobi, Kenya. He has over ten years of experience in radio, TV and online reporting. He owns Zetu Media Services in Kenya.



A few words with Yves Rugira

Yves Rugira hosting a show
at Radio Salus.
Photo: Facebook / Yves Rugira



By Mugume Davis,
Kampala, Uganda

The Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) awards journalists for excellent and objective reporting on the River Nile and the environment. One of the Nile Media Awards 2021 winners is Yves Rugira, whose story focuses on deforestation's impact on society and children in particular. Yves talks to experts and officials and explores how children have to walk for long hours searching for firewood and water. Mugume Davis spoke to him about his experiences:

The Niles: How does it feel to be the winner of the Nile Media Awards in the Radio category?

Yves Rugira: I'm excited and full of joy to be a winner in the Radio category. This is my first international award, and receiving it was an unforgettable moment.

TN: Why did you work on this particular story?

YR: In this story, I tried to show a link between climate change caused by deforestation and its effect on education. Rural children from poor families travel long distances to collect firewood or water, causing them to drop out of school. I have investigated this reality to show decision-makers that there is a gap to fill.

TN: Do you think your story and all the other stories you produce have an impact?

YR: Yes, of course. After I interviewed my sources and the story went on air where I described my in-depth investigation, I started receiving calls from government officials and partners. In particular, officials from the Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA) and the Ministry of Environment in Rwanda complimented me. And in the following days, the government started a campaign in rural areas to mobilise and inform people about the use of gas as an alternative to firewood.

TN: Journalism is often a daring job. What is your motivation?

YR: Journalism is my passion, and I live it. On my weekly programme, the "Ahajishe Igisabo Show", which airs every Monday from 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM, I focus on Nyungwe National Park, looking at tourism, biodiversity, revenue sharing, and protection. And every Tuesday from 9:30 AM to 10:00 AM, I host another show, "Bungabunga Ibidukikije", which focuses on environmental protection. In fact, journalism helps me meet with audiences, policymakers, professionals, and governmental and non-governmental organisations who help me gain more skills and experiences.

TN: In a nutshell, what is your take on current Nile Basin affairs and Nile Cooperation?

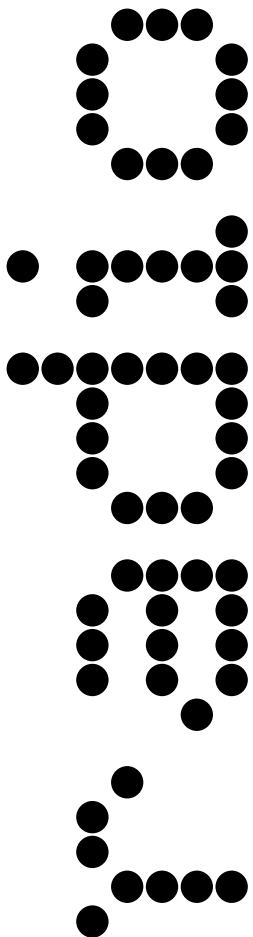
YR: For me, Nile Basin affairs and Nile Cooperation demonstrate collaboration: look at the big projects among countries working together. Yes, sometimes we have heard of disagreements between two or three countries, but I am pleased to learn that there are efforts to bring about more amicable relations, making today's Nile Basin better than yesterday's.

TN: What do you think needs to be done to ensure more and better Nile Cooperation?

YR: Everyone in the Nile Basin needs to understand that all countries are equal and have the right to use the Nile water resources. No country should feel like it has more rights than any other. Nile Basin countries should cooperate more when implementing big projects along the Nile.

TN: So how can the media and journalists contribute to foster more and better Nile Cooperation?

YR: Journalists should be accorded more space and airtime to express their ideas and suggestions about current developments and relations between Nile Basin countries. This is possible if all partners, including NGOs and governments, cooperate with journalists and the media in general.



How climate change damages children's education

In October 2020, Rwanda embarked on an ambitious six-year initiative that will promote biodiversity, foster ecosystem services, increase agricultural productivity and reduce the vulnerability of people and ecosystems to the adverse effects of climate change.
Photo: Flickr / REMA

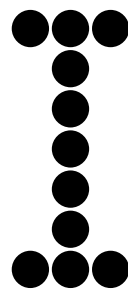


By Yves Rugira,
Huye, Rwanda

Publication:
Radio Salus, May 3, 2018



Yves Rugira is the Environmental Editor for Radio Salus in Huye, Rwanda. He has been working with Radio Salus since 2011. Besides his degree in Sociology, Yves has completed several specialisation courses on climate change, environmental and biodiversity conservation reporting.



Increasingly erratic rains due to climate change, the resulting deforestation and land degradation challenge Rwanda's growing population, of which more than a third lives in poverty. Particularly children from low-income families, who depend directly on access to natural resources, are vulnerable to climate change. In this radio feature, Yves Rugira reports how the changing climate and environment harms the education of these children.



How member states benefit from the Nile Basin Initiative

The Nile Day celebrations in Khartoum, Sudan on February 22, 2020: Nile Day is an annual event held to commemorate the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) establishment on February 22, 1999.
Photo: The Niles / Dominik Lehnert

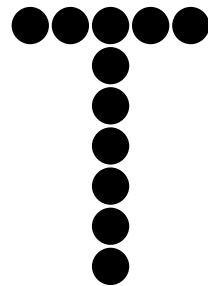


By Sarah Natoolo,
Kampala, Uganda

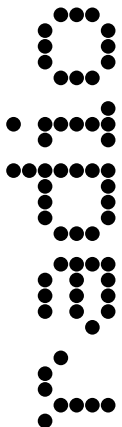
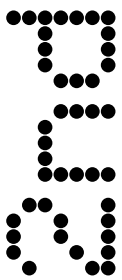
Publication:
Uganda Broadcasting Corporation, UBC Radio,
November 15, 2018



Sarah Natoolo is a journalist from Uganda. She has been working for over 12 years as a reporter for the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation, UBC Radio, focusing on science, technology, environment, health, agriculture and emergency related topics.



The Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) is a partnership among the Nile riparian states that seeks to develop the river cooperatively, share substantial socioeconomic benefits, and promote regional peace and security. Sarah Natoolo reports about the challenges the NBI member states and their growing populations face and how they benefit from the various programmes of the initiative, turning challenges into opportunities for cooperation and shared benefits.



Tackling growing challenges of water scarcity

According to OCHA South Sudan estimations, over 1 million people were affected by the 2020 floods in South Sudan.

Photo: The Niles / Bullen Chol

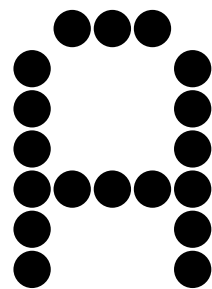


By Waakhe Simon, Juba, South Sudan

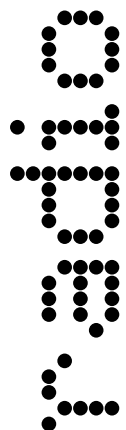
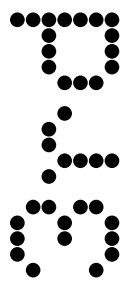
Publication: Voice of America, October 24, 2019



Waakhe Simon Wudu is a freelance reporter for international news agencies, including Voice of America and Agence France-Presse. A “prolific, political and conflict-sensitive news writer”, as he describes himself, Waakhe also reports frequently on challenges faced by the entire Nile Basin, e.g., climate change, water scarcity, growing populations and environmental degradation.



At present, around 10 percent of the Nile Basin’s population faces chronic water scarcity due to the region’s seasonal aridity and the highly unequal distribution of water resources. Climate projections suggest that the amount of rain across the basin could increase. But, floods caused by erratic rainfall and devastating hot and dry spells are projected to become more frequent. Against the backdrop of growing populations, the Nile riparian states must cooperate to tackle current and future challenges, reports Waakhe Simon.



Members of the production team behind the film “The Niles: A shared destiny” in Entebbe, Uganda.
Photo: The Niles / Bebe Joel



By Mugume Davis,
Kampala, Uganda

A few words with Sadiki Businge and Mugume Davis

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together,” is an African Proverb. This is precisely what happened when a team of ten reporters came together to work on the video documentary, “The Nile: A shared destiny”, published by The Niles. The film won in two categories, best television entry and best collaborative story. Mugume Davis Rwakaringi and Businge Sadiki were part of the winning team and shared their excitement about the prize.

The Niles: How does it feel to be the winner of the Nile Media Award in the Television category?

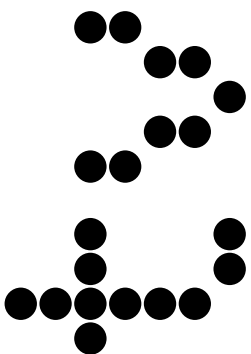
Mugume Davis: Well, I feel more passionate and motivated, especially to pursue water-related stories. It’s great to know that your work can have an impact on the world.


Sadiki Businge: Yes, I am equally motivated to do stories about water or just the River Nile and do as many environmental stories as possible.

TN: Why did you work on this particular story?

SB: The River Nile is the world’s longest river; it was important to work on this story to understand it even better.

MD: Millions of people who live along depend on it directly or indirectly. River Nile water provides water for domestic use, irrigation, and energy in the form of hydropower. The river is also a habitat for wildlife, provides fish and is a source of revenue through tourism. Working on this story offered an opportunity to highlight not only its importance but also its beauty.



 *I would recommend to other journalists to seek colleagues to collaborate with whenever possible.”*

TN: Do you think your story and all the other stories you produce have an impact?

MD: Definitely. Not just my story but any story about the River Nile and the environment. Water issues need a lot of attention, and the only way to do this is by having more coverage – keeping it in the media and people’s minds!

SB: Our stories are raising awareness in educating our communities. I think an aware community is the greatest weapon against water degradation. So yes, in that sense, our stories have a considerable impact.

TN: Journalism is often a daring job. What is your motivation?

SB: They say curiosity killed the cat, but I would say I am very curious about water issues. Consequently, I have been able to dig up complex issues, bring them to the light and share them in simple terms for my community to digest. I believe that the impact they bring, such as learning to preserve the environment, makes it so rewarding.

TN: In a nutshell, what is your take on current Nile Basin affairs and Nile Cooperation? And what do you think needs to be done to ensure more and better Nile Cooperation?

MD: There have been efforts for the members of the NBI trying to forge new ways of equitable use of the Nile, and this should be recommended. But the leadership in the Nile Basin should do everything to share information more and create more platforms for discussions about the Nile.

SB: My take is that there should be better agreements on using the Nile water resources.

TN: How can both the media and journalists contribute to foster more and better Nile Cooperation?

MD: I think that The Niles, for example, has done a great job uniting journalists from across the ten NBI countries. Such work should be encouraged.

SB: NBI and partners should more often organise partnerships where journalists from across these NBI countries can collaborate, network and brainstorm, bringing many new stories to the light.

TN: What is the difference between working alone and collaborating with other journalists on a story?

SB: Two heads are better than one. The chances are that when you collaborate, you share your experience and skills, meaning you make a better product than if you were working alone.

TN: What challenges did you face while working on this collaborative story?

SB: I wouldn’t say it was a big challenge, but the fact that you are many people working on the same project means that you may have too much material, and it is not easy to decide what to omit or use for the final project.

TN: And how did you overcome that?

SB: As a team. We democratically agreed on what we thought was the best material for the final project.

TN: Will you work on collaborative stories again in the future?

SB: Most definitely. And I would recommend to other journalists to seek colleagues to collaborate with whenever possible.

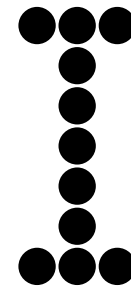
The Nile: A shared destiny

The Nile in Sudan's capital
Khartoum.
Photo: The Niles / Mohamed
Hilali

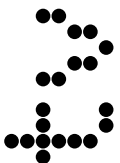
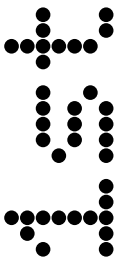


By Yosra Mostafa, Businge Sadiki,
Asmaa Gamal, Mohamed Hilali, Bebe Joel,
Bullen Chol, Dagim Terefe, Kevin Ogutu,
Mugume Davis, Fabien Niyonizigiye,
Entebbe, Uganda

Publication:
The Niles, February 22, 2019



In this film, The Niles correspondents look
at 20 years Nile Basin Initiative and explain
why nations that share the same resources
must unite.



Best Collaborative Story:
The film "The Nile: A shared destiny" was recognised as "Best Collaborative Story" at the Nile Media Awards 2021.



Yosra Mostafa works as a freelance translator, journalist and communications advisor whilst also devoting time to community development. Yosra lives in Cairo, Egypt.



Businge Sadiki is a freelance journalist and filmmaker from Rwanda. He runs his own film production company in Kigali.



Asmaa Gamal is a freelance journalist, photographer and filmmaker. She lives in Cairo, Egypt, and works for several print and television outlets, including the Daily News Egypt.



Mohamed Hilali, a freelance journalist from Khartoum, Sudan, has worked with several prominent Sudanese newspapers since 2006. He also serves as a consultant on several media development projects.



Bebe Joel, the CEO & Founder of Bebe Pix Productions and Talent211 Films, is a film and music video director and content creator based in Juba, South Sudan.



Bullen Chol is a photographer and filmmaker documenting social and political issues. Bullen also contributes to various newspapers and works as a radio presenter and reporter in Juba, South Sudan.



Dagim Terefe is an award-winning Ethiopian freelance journalist. His reports and documentary films, featured on InfoNile, Addis TV and Fana Broadcasting, mainly focus on environmental topics.



Kevin Ogutu is a multimedia journalist from Kenya. He works as a TV Reporter for KTN News, part of The Standard Group in Nairobi, Kenya.



Mugume Davis is a multimedia journalist from Uganda. Mugume works with various local and international media organisations, covering political, social and economic stories.



Fabien Niyonizigiye is a journalist for Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi (RTNB). He works in the TV department and focuses on environmental issues.



The hydro quagmire

A boy collects free water from a burst water pipe in Nairobi's largest slum.
Photo: Department of Engineering University of Cambridge via Flickr / Victoria Hickman

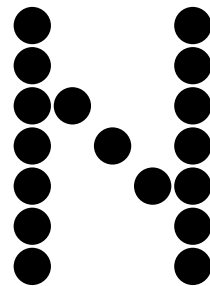


By Cynthia Gichiri,
Nakuru, Kenya

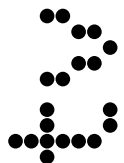
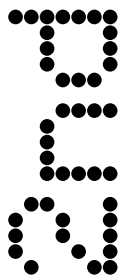
Publication:
Africa Uncensored, July 8, 2020



Cynthia Gichiri is a freelance journalist based in Nakuru, Kenya, with eight years of experience in broadcast journalism. Cynthia is passionate about producing stories about conflict, gender, governance and the environment.

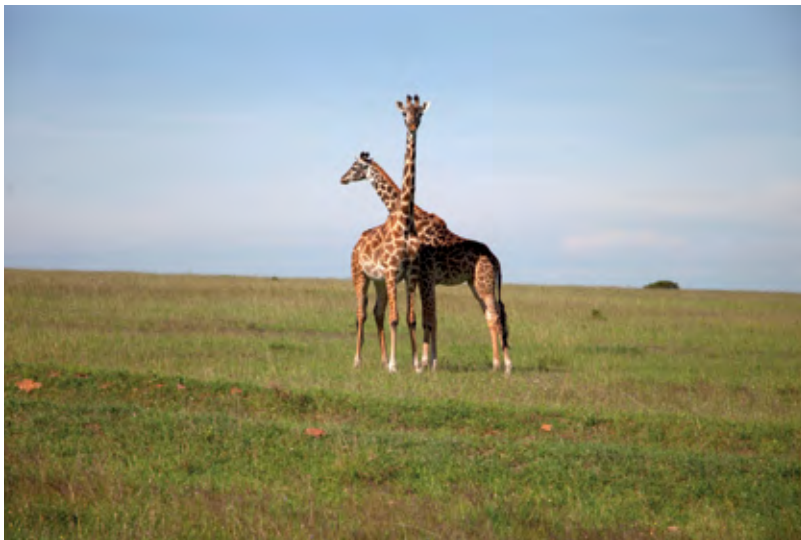


Nairobi accounts for the bulk of COVID-19 infections in Kenya. Cynthia Gichiri reports about the city's acute water shortages and investigates how its over 4 million residents cope with a pandemic and the lack of water.



Saving the Mara Basin: Stakeholders want Mau settlers moved

The Mara River Basin is under immense and increasing pressure from human-related activities.
Photo: The Niles / Dominik Lehnert

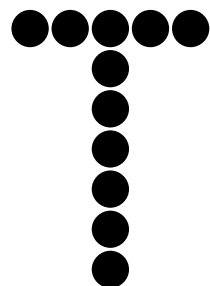


By Kevin Ogutu,
Kisumu, Kenya

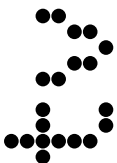
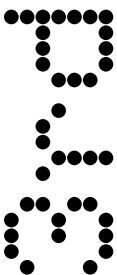
Publication:
The Standard Group, KTN News,
September 16, 2019



Kevin Ogutu is a multimedia journalist from Kenya. He works as a TV Reporter for KTN News, part of The Standard Group in Nairobi, Kenya. Kevin started as a reporter for The Nairobiian and The Standard Newspaper. Although he changed from print to broadcast journalism in 2017, following a nine-month in-house training by the Standard Group, his passion for covering environmental topics remained.



The Mara River Basin, shared by Kenya and Tanzania, is home to the highest density of large herbivores on Earth. Farming, deforestation, mining, a proliferation of tourist facilities with unsustainable effluent management, illegal fishing and invasive species could spell the end for the transboundary Mara River. State and non-state-actors from both countries are pushing for public-private partnerships to protect the ecological treasure trove, reports Kevin Ogutu.



A few words with Asmaa Gamal

The Egyptian photographer and filmmaker Asmaa Gamal during a The Niles editorial conference.
Photo: The Niles / Dominik Lehnert



By Elzahraa Jadallah,
Khartoum, Sudan

“The things we are passionate about compel us to follow them,” says the Egyptian photographer Asmaa Gamal, who won the Nile Media Awards 2021 in the Photography category, about her motivation to pursue a career as a visual storyteller.

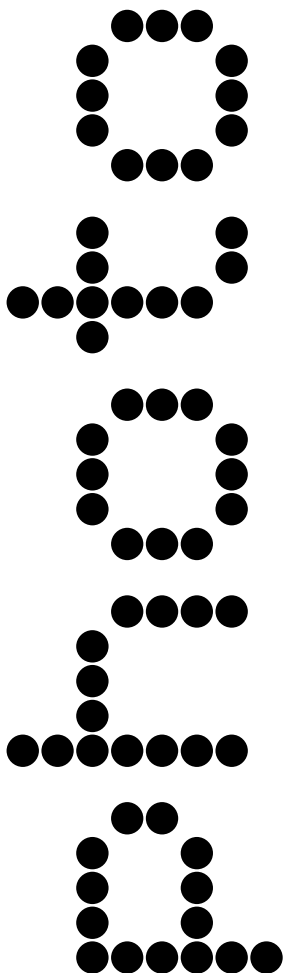
Inspired by her love for photography and frustrated with the lacking creativity dominant in the Egyptian media regarding visual content, Asmaa set out to become the remarkable photographer and filmmaker she is today.


Her winning picture story, “Bread: The food that sparks revolutions”, was published as part of The Niles 14, The Food and Food Security Issue in 2019.

“I wanted to work on this story because bread in Egypt is the most important thing in peoples’ everyday lives,” says Asmaa. The story of bread in Egypt dates back to the distant past.

“Since ancient times, Egyptians painted wheat and bread on the walls of their temples. It’s part of our culture as bread is the main food item for people from different walks of life,” she adds.

And no leader should take the Egyptians’ connection to bread too lightly. In 1977 hundreds of thousands of poor people protested against the rising prices of bread. “Even the





The universal power of the picture is that it can change the way people see things.”

word bread means life and making a living for us,” explains Asmaa.

Removing language barriers

“Journalism and media are an ancient concept since drums were used to call for war. It is people’s right to have information that enlightens them and keeps them up to date about developments and issues of their concern”, says Asmaa.

She believes that delivering stories through photography removes all language and cultural barriers. “The universal power of the picture is that it can change the way people see things or make them notice new angles, besides preserving the story for all times.”

Asmaa says that social media has helped many photojournalists showcase their work and reach more people than they used to when pictures were only printed in newspapers and books.

Reaching more people “has also helped in strengthening the impact of the pictures”, says Asmaa.

Support and encouragement is needed

Female journalists need more support from both institutions and society, says Asmaa. “They need to be empowered”, considering that until recently, women in Egypt who put their photos on social media and female photography, in general, was frowned upon.

She thinks that the various challenges and obstacles facing female journalists often drive them to quit. And with fewer women in the media sector in general, there are only very few women who make it to the top and into decision making positions.

To change that, says Asmaa, several things can be done, such as “highlighting success stories of female photographers and journalists, equipping them with skills to practice their

job feeling more secure and general support and encouragement”.

“Talented female journalists need to be supported. But they also need to work themselves on their professional development, keeping up with the ever-changing world of photography: work on your skills, read more and build your capacity.”

Coming together

“The training and workshops I attend – like those held by the Nile Basin Initiative – brings people from all over the Nile Basin region together and allows us to work on Nile stories and visual content together. These types of events need to be continued and pushed, and cooperation should be further promoted,” says Asmaa.

Cooperation is needed especially now, adds Asmaa, given all the controversy and disagreement on various transboundary issues such as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). This requires all journalists from across the Nile Basin countries to raise awareness on possible solutions and produce non-biased stories.

“Media in each country of the Nile Basin is mainly directed towards politicising the issues of the Nile, and instead of promoting collaboration, it widens the gap between the nations. That’s why we need more independent projects, outside governmental control, that support independent media to produce reasonable and credible reports.”

“There has to be more support for independent journalists who report the truth rather than just spreading the views of their respective government,” Asmaa adds.

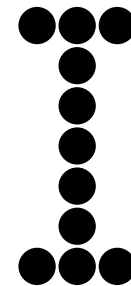
Bread: The food that sparks revolutions

Am Mohamed is 80 years old and lives in Mansoura. Every week, she and her children bake bread at their home. "My mother taught me the way of baking local bread."

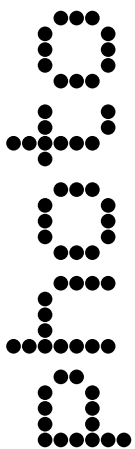
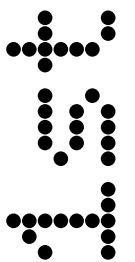


By Asmaa Gamal,
Cairo, Egypt

Publication:
The Niles, December 2019



In 1977, hundreds of thousands of poor people protested against rising prices of basic foodstuffs, such as local bread. Food riots erupted across the country for two days – from Aswan in Upper Egypt to Alexandria. Bread is the primary food of the people, which is why it is called "living" in Arabic. Every day, thousands of poor people depend on bread as an essential foodstuff. Inflation in 2017 caused food prices to rise, and people took to the streets to protest. Today, bread is the cheapest food in Egypt and remains centerstage in day-to-day life across the country.





"Now I teach new generations how to bake bread because it is an essential food, and we eat it for most meals every day," says Am Mohamed.



Asmaa Gamal is a freelance journalist, photographer and filmmaker from Cairo, Egypt. She works for several print and television outlets, e.g. Daily News Egypt and The Niles. Her photographs are used by international agencies and published in several magazines, including National Geographic (Arabic). In 2015, Asmaa was recommended by Instagram as one of 12 Instagram photographers to follow around the world. 'A Journey to Thailand' is her second photo book following 'The Seven Seeds', which documents Egypt's celebration of newborn babies.



Mohamed el Bandre and his family bake bread.



"When I was young, I came to Cairo and learned how to bake bread," says Mohamed el Bandre.

Hader and her mother bake different types of bread and sell it in front of their house.



Hader said: "Every day, women come and ask for local bread, and sometimes they bring wheat."



Before you sail away

By MiCT The Niles,
Berlin, Germany

1.

Press pause: The sheer speed of social media means we're often compelled to quickly hit 'forward' and share the message we've just received. It's critical to stop, pause and reflect before sharing. Misinformation spreads rampantly, but corrections often gain little traction.

2.

Think! Does this information seem reasonable/likely/believable? Things that seem 'off' often are. If you're not sure about the authorship or the content, dig a little deeper before sharing the story with your friends and family.

3.

Check the source: Do you know the sender? Are these their words or something they have forwarded to you? If there is no obvious source of information, go back to the sender and ask for clarification. When sharing information with others, always try to include the source.

4.

Can you verify? If some of the story seems true, but not all of it, it might be worth checking each piece of information (use fact-checking resources to help you verify whether the information is accurate). A hoaxer may have hidden lies amongst their facts – making those lies easier to believe and easier to share with your family and friends.

5.

Don't mistake duplication for verification: Receiving the same information from multiple senders is not source verification. The viral nature of misinformation and disinformation sometimes makes it seem true because everyone is sharing; it's critical to fact-check with such messages.

6.

Consider the quality: Reputable news sources won't publish articles full of spelling or grammatical mistakes. If you notice any typos or other blatant errors, you're probably reading a website with low credibility.

7.

Beware of fake images and videos: With today's advanced image manipulation tools, it's relatively straightforward for someone to create a believable fake image or even a video. You should thus never believe a story based solely on a screenshot, image, or video clip.

8.

Read reputable sources in the first place: To avoid exposing yourself to false stories as much as possible, you should stick to legitimate sites and reporters as much as you can. Keep in mind, though, that just because a news company or brand is mainstream doesn't mean that it's trustworthy. But once you've vetted some sources and feel you can reasonably trust them, you should get your news there instead of from social media.

9.

Contest dis- and misinformation when you see it: If you see someone share a story on social media that you know is false, don't let it sit out and confuse others. You should comment on the post with a link to a trusted source that disproves the original article.

10.

Is it true, or do I just want it to be true? Posting things just because you agree with them or would like them to be true is a dangerous motivator for spreading fake news. We all need to be careful not to promote a message that downplays the situation in our respective countries/communities.

P.S.

Take some time to go through "Too much information: a public guide to navigating the infodemic", pulled together by the First Draft team.

The continuous efforts of journalists from across the basin to inform the public and build bridges amongst the diverse Nile audiences cannot be separated from the environment in which they evolve.

That is where we would like to encourage you, esteemed reader, to claim your right to be informed and fulfil your responsibility to consume and share information conscientiously.

Everyone has a responsibility to learn and use critical literacy skills online and offline. Critical literacy is about questioning information, authority and power, but it is simply not sufficient in the digital age.

Amplified by digital dissemination, dis- and misinformation undermine social inclusion, democratic participation and cooperation. Fake news are symptomatic of information disorder, a challenge that we can only address together – cooperatively.

After all, what is the point of having excellent, constructive, fact-based, accurate and ethical journalism if it can be bypassed by dis- and misinformation on social media – often unintentionally by unaware media consumers.

Let's share our responsibility to fight fake news and promote critical literacy online and offline. Here are The Niles editorial team's top-10 tips:

