

# The GERD from an Ethiopian Perspective: Actors, Interests and Instruments

by Jesutimilehin O. Akamo

## ABSTRACT

For Ethiopia, proposals on sharing the Nile waters and the filling and operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) must demonstrate flexibility (that is, be legally non-binding) and distance from the order that existed before the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA, or Entebbe Agreement). The GERD represents a move by Ethiopia to enhance economic security, boost its resilience against drought and consolidate its newfound hydro-political influence towards ensuring equitable and reasonable use of the Nile waters by riparian states. Ethiopia has demonstrated intentionality and consistency in its Nile policy under which the GERD falls. The link between the GERD, Ethiopia's internal crisis and its perception of an international bias tend to threaten the likelihood of a mutually agreed deal. However, building mutual trust, strategic concessions and de-internationalising the GERD talks to the barest minimum are necessary steps to break the stalemate.

*Water | Security | Ethiopia | Egypt | Sudan*

**keywords**

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by Jesutimilehin O. Akamo\*

## 1. Background

Ethiopia announced the intent to build a Grand Millennium Dam on the Blue Nile River in 2011. This announcement came after six out of the ten Nile riparian states signed the 2010 Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA), also known as the Entebbe Agreement.<sup>1</sup> From Ethiopia's viewpoint, the CFA is expected to replace the 1902, 1929 and 1959 agreements. Egypt and the Republic of Sudan considered the 1902, 1929 and 1959 agreements to be the Basin's binding legal framework which Ethiopia opposed because they were signed during the colonial era and were not in its best interest.<sup>2</sup> It is considered a historical imbalance.<sup>3</sup> Regardless, the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, in its Article 34, and the Nyerere doctrine makes it clear that those agreements are legally non-binding on Ethiopia.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See full text of the agreement and the signatories in the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) website: *Cooperative Framework Agreement*, <https://nilebasin.org/nbi/cooperative-framework-agreement>.

<sup>2</sup> Please read the background paper: Francesca Caruso, "Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam. The Law, History, Politics and Geopolitics behind Africa's Largest Hydropower Project", in *IAI Papers*, No. 22|27 (October 2022) <https://www.iai.it/en/node/16154>.

<sup>3</sup> Ngambouk Vitalis Pemunta et al., "The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, Egyptian National Security, and Human and Food Security in the Nile River Basin", in *Cogent Social Sciences*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2021), Article 1875598, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2021.1875598>.

<sup>4</sup> While the Article 34 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties states that a treaty does not create obligations or rights for a third party without its consent, Ethiopia was neither colonised nor a party to those agreements. Also, the Nyerere Doctrine on State Succession to colonial treaties concluded that the former colonies are not bound by colonial water treaties.

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The CFA is a product of the decade-long effort to enhance cooperation on the use of Nile Basin water under the auspices of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), which was instituted in 1999. The aim of this agreement is to seek a permanent legal and institutional arrangement for governing the Nile River Basin by promoting “integrated management, sustainable development, and harmonious utilization of the water resources of the Basin, as well as their conservation and protection for the benefit of present and future generations”.<sup>5</sup> The concept of equitable water allocation introduced in the text did not generate conflict between the signatories, save article 14b which remained a bone of contention.

Article 14b states that the use of the Nile waters should not “significantly affect the water security of any other Nile Basin Stat[e]”. But according to Egypt, the article should rather say that the use of Nile waters should “not to adversely affect the water security and current uses and rights of any other Nile Basin State”. Because of this debate, there has been no consensus between the upstream and downstream states (especially Egypt) on article 14b. For Egypt, “adversely” reflects the consideration of possible negative impacts of the activities of any of the riparian states on others.<sup>6</sup> Thus, ambiguity, fluidity and debate on what “water security” means and its link to national security have undermined negotiations.<sup>7</sup> Post-CFA talks have broken down because Ethiopia has refused to sign a legally binding agreement on the filling and operation of the GERD. Concerning water allocation, Ethiopia’s position has always been that it should be an all-inclusive process involving all 11 riparian states. Ethiopia’s preference is a non-legally binding guideline, and therefore it believes the CFA is sufficient.

## 2. Local dynamics and national interest

The factors that drove and strengthened Ethiopia’s continued push for the GERD vision are fourfold: ideology, development, politics and (national) security. From the ideological standpoint, the mission was to give Ethiopia’s society a shared vision with respect to Ethiopia’s advancement towards higher stages of development and independence.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, failing to use the Nile (as other countries, such as Egypt, do) is perceived as blow to national identity and prestige. The GERD discourse thus became a symbol of Ethiopian nationalism and renaissance. At the national

<sup>5</sup> See the text of the agreement in the NBI website: *Cooperative Framework Agreement*, cit.

<sup>6</sup> Tadesse Kassa Woldetsadik, “The Nile Basin Initiative and the Cooperative Framework Agreement: Failing Institutional Enterprises? A Script in Legal History of the Diplomatic Confront (1993–2016)”, in *Mizan Law Review*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (September 2017), p. 196-228, <https://doi.org/10.4314/mlr.v11i1.7>.

<sup>7</sup> Dereje Zeleke Mekonnen, “The Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement Negotiations and the Adoption of a ‘Water Security’ Paradigm: Flight into Obscurity or a Logical Cul-de-sac?”, in *The European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (May 2010), p. 421-440, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chq027>.

<sup>8</sup> Ethiopia Ministry of Capacity Building, *Comprehensive Justice System Reform Program. Baseline Study Report*, Leiden, Center for International Legal Cooperation, February 2005, <https://www.cilc.nl/cms/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/CILC-Ethiopia-D-05-0103.pdf>.

level, it reflects the nationalism as driven by hydro-solidarity.<sup>9</sup> This is reiterated by evidence of the interwoven nature of political and ethnic identities in Ethiopia, which raises concerns about an ideological meeting point in which the GERD, in its potentiality, is presented as a token of “creedal national identity”.<sup>10</sup> In the same vein (especially as an extension of creedal national identity) Ethiopians view the GERD as a symbol of national prestige.<sup>11</sup>

Another, major motivation that fuels this ideological angle of the GERD’s importance is rooted in the developmental argument. Essentially, electrification and other developmental benefits that serve as the rationale for the GERD construction have been presented as way to address Ethiopia’s basic needs. In the early 2000s, the NBI’s trajectory towards inclusivity and shared use of the Nile basin raised Ethiopia’s expectation of implementing several projects for developmental and socioeconomic benefits, especially electrification.<sup>12</sup> Ethiopia needed more reliable sources of electricity which is a problem the GERD solves to a large extent, thereby putting the GERD at the core of Ethiopia’s development agenda to enhance industrialisation, citizen welfare and human development.

The GERD is also highly political as the question of the use of the Nile is presented as an Ethiopian sovereign right.<sup>13</sup> Ethiopia contributes up to 86 per cent of the Nile waters, even while it is one of the countries that has least benefited from the river due to the pre-CFA agreements favouring Egypt and Sudan, which claimed historic rights over the Nile’s water regardless of its source.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the GERD is integral to Ethiopian state identity and an instrument of legitimacy for the government in power.<sup>15</sup> This is evident in the naming and funding of the GERD, as well as in the framing adopted in speeches by senior government officials, describing the dam as a “flag bearer project” and an “expression of our identity”.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Dalia Abdelhady et al., “The Nile and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: Is There a Meeting Point between Nationalism and Hydrosolidarity?”, in *Journal of Contemporary Water Research & Education*, Vol. 155, No. 1 (July 2015), p. 73-82, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1936-704X.2015.03197.x>.

<sup>10</sup> Andebet Hailu Assefa and Belayneh Taye Gedifew, “Symbolic Values and Implications of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project in Ethiopian Identity Politics”, in *Skhid*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (May/June 2021), p. 5-14, [https://doi.org/10.21847/1728-9343.2021.1\(2\).229192](https://doi.org/10.21847/1728-9343.2021.1(2).229192). “Creedal national identity” is a concept borrowed from Francis Fukuyama, *Identity. The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Evidence to support this is backed by a 2018 phone interview with a think-tank official (identity undisclosed) conducted by International Crisis Group authors. The demographic and sectoral range of individuals who donated for the GERD construction was cited. See International Crisis Group, “Bridging the Gap in the Nile Waters Dispute”, in *ICG Africa Reports*, No. 271 (20 March 2019), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/node/9541>. The army also contributed; see Haftu Gebrezgabiher, “Ethiopia: Army Contributes over 800 Million Birr to GERD”, in *The Ethiopian Herald*, 29 November 2017, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201711290631.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Rawia Tawfik, “The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: A Benefit-Sharing Project in the Eastern Nile?”, in *Water International*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2016), p. 574-592.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with an Ethiopia country expert, 11 February 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with a Horn of Africa regional Expert, 26 January 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

The GERD is becoming an essential subject in Ethiopia's internal political space, especially within the context of its potential developmental benefits. Thus, the country's past and present political leaders have been unwilling to compromise because their position on the GERD potentially impacts their political career. Notably, the support for the GERD goes as deep as diaspora support and local support with local taxi drivers with #MyDam (or similar) stickers.<sup>17</sup>

Although dams had been envisioned since the late 1960s and had their roots in the survey of the Nile and Lake Tana that commenced in the 1920s, Meles Zenawi nursed the commencement of the GERD's realisation.<sup>18</sup> He believed that the GERD was an economic, political and regional tool for Ethiopia's development and the enhancement of the country's hegemonic status in the region – challenging Egypt's hydro-hegemony. Meles Zenawi dominated all branches of government and encouraged a hard-line and whole-of-society approach towards the GERD construction.<sup>19</sup> After Zenawi's death in 2012, progress on construction slowed because the country was preoccupied with an ethnic crisis in the Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz communities, along with economic slowdown, corruption and mismanagement.<sup>20</sup> More so, the principal who had driven the agenda was no more. Regardless, construction never stopped. Zenawi's successor, Haliemariam Desalegn, later resigned bending to the tide of the political upheaval in the country. But under Abiy Ahmed, Desalegn's successor, the GERD construction picked up pace.

Abiy Ahmed's policy towards the GERD has maintained consistency with that of his predecessors. However, his approach tends to be less hard-line as he has shown more openness to talks, even though he has not compromised on the filling and operation of the GERD.<sup>21</sup> In his peace quest, another testament to a less hard-line approach, Abiy forced Intelligence Head Getachew Assefa and Armed Forces Chief Samora Yunus into retirement and showed greater sensitivity than his predecessors to the concerns of downstream countries Egypt and Sudan.<sup>22</sup> Gradually, Abiy Ahmed appears to have cultivated a friendlier terrain for talks

<sup>17</sup> See Pawlos Belete, "Ethiopians in Nuremberg, Germany Hold Fund Raising Campaign to Support GERD, Displaced", in *Walta News*, 2 September 2021, <https://waltainfo.com/?p=107984>.

<sup>18</sup> See Tadesse Kassa Woldetsadik, "The Nile Basin Initiative and the Cooperative Framework Agreement: Failing Institutional Enterprises?", cit.; and James McCann, "Ethiopia, Britain, and Negotiations for the Lake Tana Dam, 1922-1935", in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (1981), p. 667-699.

<sup>19</sup> International Crisis Group, "Bridging the Gap in the Nile Waters Dispute", cit.

<sup>20</sup> Mulunesh Dessie Admassu, "Causes of Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia and Its Effect on Development: The Case of 'Amhara' and 'Gumuz' Communities", in *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, Vol. 21 No. 3 (September 2019), p. 64-79, <https://jsd-africa.com/Jsda/2019%20V21%20No3%20Fall/article19-03.html>.

<sup>21</sup> See Hamza Hendawi, "Ethiopia's Abiy Seeks to Allay Egyptian and Sudanese Fears over GERD", in *The National News*, 21 January 2022, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/2022/01/20/ethiopia-abiy-seeks-to-allay-egyptian-and-sudanese-fears-over-gerd>.

<sup>22</sup> International Crisis Group, "Bridging the Gap in the Nile Waters Dispute", cit.

between the three riparian states.<sup>23</sup>

The potential setback, however, which has taken on a regional nature, is the internal crisis in Ethiopia.<sup>24</sup> This includes the Tigray crisis and unrest in Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia.<sup>25</sup> The conflicts can sabotage progress on GERD construction. For example, the dam's location in Benishangul-Gumuz is a direct threat to its completion and proper functioning. Also, other crises can be leveraged by external actors towards state failure or destabilisation of the government in order to disrupt work on the dam; and Ethiopia has accused Egypt of such interference in the Tigray crisis.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. Instruments and processes

The NBI's failure to implement the intended projects became a concern for Ethiopia. Arguably, the commencement of the GERD's construction without the input of upstream states has been one of the responses to the NBI's failure. From a legal viewpoint, no cooperative legal and institutional framework was arrived at. Also, after the decades of negotiation (1997–2007) there was no political consensus on the CFA (signing and ratification). This pattern of failures encouraged Ethiopia's actions to achieve electrification independently.<sup>27</sup> Over the years, Ethiopia's GERD project has spawned negotiations, studies, panels and committees, private consulting companies and signed agreements as the instruments and processes used by the riparian states and other actors to address the issue. This approach has given more allowance to multilateralism.

A significant realistic compromise deserving spotlighting is the March 2015 Declaration of Principles (DoP) that was signed by Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan.<sup>28</sup> The DoP formed a basis upon which some of the riparian states' concerns could be addressed. A notable principle in the declaration was the agreement by all parties to use the result of the studies recommended by the International Panel of Experts for a joint definition of the guidelines and rules in the filling and operation of the dam.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> International Crisis Group, "Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North", in *ICG Africa Briefings*, No. 156 (12 June 2020), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/node/13822>.

<sup>25</sup> See Mehdi Labzaé, "Benishangul Conflict Spurred by Investment, Land Titling, Rumors", in *Ethiopia Insight*, 8 March 2019, <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/?p=39651>.

<sup>26</sup> Abir Sorour, "Ethiopia – Tigray: What Does Egypt Stand to Gain or Lose from the One-Year War?", in *The Africa Report*, 5 November 2021, <https://www.theafricareport.com/143814>.

<sup>27</sup> Ana Elisa Cascão, "Changing Power Relations in the Nile River Basin: Unilateralism vs. Cooperation?", in *Water Alternatives*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (June 2009), p. 245-268, <https://www.water-alternatives.org/index.php/alldoc/articles/vol2/v2issue2/52-a2-2-5>.

<sup>28</sup> Rawia Tawfik, "The Declaration of Principles on Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam: A Breakthrough or Another Unfair Deal?", in *The Current Column*, 25 March 2015, <https://www.idos-research.de/die-aktuelle-kolumne/article/the-declaration-of-principles-on-ethiopias-renaissance-dam-a-breakthrough-or-another-unfair-deal>.

While Ethiopia maintains the right to make adjustments, it is obligated to inform the downstream states. Even though this is a potential point of conflict, it stands to reason that Ethiopia is more likely to agree to this condition as it is in alignment with the developmental and (geo)political interests and objectives the GERD serves. Deficient in specificity, the DoP's provisions were open to multiple interpretations and expectations whereby Ethiopia and Egypt disagree on compensation for significant harm, "acquired rights", and the dam's size and storage capacity, to mention just a few.<sup>29</sup> Thus, as much as the DoP passes for progress, its deficiency is also an Achilles' heel for a permanent solution. As of 2022, Egypt has expressed dissatisfaction over Ethiopia's lack of commitment to the DoP, in that Addis has continued the filling and operation of the dam without the consent of downstream states. Egypt, in the letter to the President of the UNSC and Russian Permanent Representative to the UN Vasily Nebenzia in February 2022, named it a "material breach" of the DoP.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, Ethiopia's position is that the DoP does not contain such clause that its parties shall reach an agreement before Ethiopia starts filling the dam.<sup>31</sup> Hence, from Ethiopia's viewpoint it is not breaching the DoP.

The local dynamics and national interest discussed earlier provide the ideological and political basis for such an approach; and herein lies the dilemma: Is Ethiopia willing to pursue its GERD agenda based on the consent of downstream states? Looking at electrification, which it now has the power to pursue, this is unlikely.

Another dimension is the legal status of the 2015 DoP. Egypt sent a *note verbale* dated 1 May 2020 appealing to the United Nations Security Council over what it believed to be an international legal obligation to pause the filling of the reservoir until the conclusion of a comprehensive agreement.<sup>32</sup> The claim was based on Principle 5 of the DoP. However, Ethiopia is not under any international legal obligation and therefore chose not to honour the request. First, the DoP is not a treaty; and second, it only emphasises the importance of cooperation and does not speak of duties or obligations. At best, the DoP reiterates or reaffirms the following principles in the conduct of riparian states as per the GERD: the principle of equitable and reasonable utilisation; the principle not to cause significant harm; the principle of exchange of information and data; the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity; the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes; the principle of development, regional integration and sustainability. These principles already exist in public international law and international water laws. In essence, the technical implication is that there has yet to be a legal dispute over the GERD.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Rawia Tawfik, "The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: A Benefit-Sharing Project in the Eastern Nile?", cit.

<sup>30</sup> See "Egypt Categorically Rejects Ethiopia's Unilateral Operation of GERD in Letter to Security Council", in *Ahram Online*, 23 February 2022, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/461634.aspx>.

<sup>31</sup> Mahemud Tekuya, "Ethiopia Does Not Need Egypt's Permission to Start Filling GERD", in *Ethiopia Insight*, 30 March 2020, <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/?p=99199>.

<sup>32</sup> Egypt, *Letter dated 1 May 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2020/355)*, <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/355>.

<sup>33</sup> Dejen Yemane Messele, "Ethiopia. Commentary: The 2015 Declaration of Principles Is Not a

More recent talks have also failed. This includes the Washington process (facilitated by the US government and the World Bank) and the South Africa and Kinshasa talks, led by the African Union (AU). The bone of contention is the potential of the proposals put forward to sabotage current and future rights over the utilisation of the Nile waters.<sup>34</sup> There is however a likelihood for a prolonged impasse because what Ethiopia considers core to its agenda is considered by the downstream states as a potentially reducing their water supply. Meanwhile, in the context of the 1959 agreement water allocation went to Egypt and Sudan, and room was left for water loss when little no allocation was made to other riparian states. Hence, from Ethiopia's perspective the claim of the downstream states as to the impact of the GERD is untenable – the Nile is a shared resource, and it should therefore take on that nature in its distribution.

The GERD crisis brings into perspective the importance of inclusion of all riparian states.<sup>35</sup> The 1966 Helsinki Rules does not agree with what the 1902, 1929 and 1959 agreements represent in terms of historic and natural rights.<sup>36</sup> The 1997 United Nations Water Convention (UNWC) follow a similar trend, thereby establishing that there is indeed a new regime, one which is not in alignment with the old order (1902, 1929 and 1959 agreements that exclude Ethiopia's interests).<sup>37</sup> However, the 2004 Berlin Rules on Water Resources constitute a meeting point for the Helsinki Rules and UNWC regarding equitable utilisation and the no-significant-harm principle.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, from Ethiopia's perspective, there is an (international) legal basis for judging the impact of the GERD on other riparian states.

The consistency of Ethiopia's response to the various instruments and processes cited above is evident.<sup>39</sup> Ethiopia is not likely to compromise the developmental, ideological, political and security objectives the GERD serves. This is also rooted in totally distancing itself from the pre-CFA arrangements. Addis Ababa has placed itself as a frontline state in the new hydro-political configuration of the Horn of Africa.<sup>40</sup> Hence, an agreement will remain elusive if Ethiopia perceives that the technical or political proposals align with the pre-CFA arrangements. Furthermore, Ethiopia's preference for the AU as moderator in the GERD talks represents, first, the need to maintain a moderator with whom some diplomatic leverage may exist;

Treaty and Ethiopia Does Not Have Obligations Therefrom", in *Addis Standard*, 21 May 2020, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202005240122.html>.

<sup>34</sup> "Three-Way Talks over Ethiopian Dam Fail in Kinshasa: Statements", in *Reuters*, 6 April 2021, <https://reut.rs/3rVDpFE>.

<sup>35</sup> See Articles 4 and 5 of the Helsinki Rules of 1966.

<sup>36</sup> The Helsinki Rules of 1966 is an international guideline on the use of rivers and their connected groundwaters that cross international boundaries.

<sup>37</sup> See Articles 5, 6 and 7 of the United Nations Water Convention of 1997.

<sup>38</sup> See Articles 12 and 16 of the Berlin Rules of 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with an Ethiopia country expert, 11 February 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Kahsay Gebrehiwet, "Hydro-hegemony, an Antiquated Notion, in the Contemporary Nile River Basin: The Rise of Water Utilization in Up-Stream Riparian Countries", in *Heliyon*, Vol. 6, No. 9 (September 2020), Article e04877, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e04877>.



and secondly, to reduce the chances of having Britain, the US, the World Bank and their allies, and any of the allies of Sudan and Egypt outside Africa as mediator.

#### 4. Regional dynamics

The stakes of Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda in the Nile are rated high; those of Tanzania, Kenya, Burundi and Rwanda are moderate; and Eritrea and the DRC are believed to have low stakes.<sup>41</sup> The downstream riparian states (Egypt and Sudan) claim historic rights to the Nile. The upstream riparian countries are opposed to this because it contradicts equity, reasonable utilisation and participation.<sup>42</sup> In this regard, they reached a deal to end Egypt's control of the river's waters, effectively dividing the region into two:<sup>43</sup> on the one side, the upstream countries which have made little use of the Nile; and on the other, the downstream countries which claim historical rights. Sudan (a downstream state) and Ethiopia (an upstream state) have not had a smooth historical past. The relationship seemed progressive under Omar Al-Bashir allowing a more cooperative diplomatic relationship. Khartoum believed in the GERD's benefit, regards it as a welcome development and deems a cordial relationship with Ethiopia beneficial for its water security.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, the situation between both countries on the subject matter seem ambivalent again under Bashir's successor.

In addition, the importance of water is highly rated by East Africa region and Egypt. Scientific evidence shows the probability of years in which the growing season is likely to fail due to drought in sub-Saharan Africa. The Horn of Africa and Egypt fall within the high probability range (41–100 per cent). The risk of water scarcity or drought places water security at the nexus of the respective foreign policies, making the Nile upstream states tilt away from an Egyptian Nile monopoly concerning the GERD. In this regard, Ethiopia will likely mobilise more support than Egypt among the riparian states.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, this will influence the posture of upstream states towards foreign intervention.

With the GERD, Ethiopia has taken on a more assertive role in the region's hydro-politics, making it more effective in playing a counter-hegemonic role to Egypt.<sup>46</sup> The relationship between Egypt and Ethiopia is historically linked both to religion

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ngambouk Vitalis Pemunta et al., "The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, Egyptian National Security, and Human and Food Security in the Nile River Basin", cit.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Yunus Turhan, "The Hydro-political Dilemma in Africa Water Geopolitics: The Case of the Nile River Basin", in *African Security Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2020), p. 66-85.

<sup>45</sup> Bekele Shiferaw et al., "Managing Vulnerability to Drought and Enhancing Livelihood Resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa: Technological, Institutional and Policy Options", in *Weather and Climate Extremes*, Vol. 3 (June 2014), p. 67-79, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wace.2014.04.004>.

<sup>46</sup> Hala Nasr and Andreas Neef, "Ethiopia's Challenge to Egyptian Hegemony in the Nile River Basin: The Case of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam", in *Geopolitics*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (2016), p. 969-989.

and the Nile. On the one hand, religion involves the relationship between the Orthodox churches of the two countries where there were similar rituals, rites and beliefs and Egypt sending clerics to Ethiopia (until 1955). The religious angle, even though a potential sociocultural tool to enhance cooperation, does not have so much impact on the geopolitical relationship. The Nile, on the other hand, has been the most defining factor in Egypt–Ethiopia relations, driving a dynamic that has mostly been adversarial in nature.<sup>47</sup> In recent years, much has remained the same despite the changes in regime. Both countries have their own, incompatible views of the regime that should govern the distribution of the Nile waters and the filling and operation of the dam. This disagreement has shaped bilateral relations to the point of mutual distrust and suspicion.

Furthermore, Egypt's constitutional rigidity is a major concern for Ethiopia's regional ambition. This is about hydro-hegemony as a major upstream state. Apart from emphasising the importance of the Nile to Egypt's state identity, culture and civilisation, and stating access to the Nile as a right of Egyptian citizens, Article (44) of Egypt's constitution of 2014 defines the protection of the Nile waters as a responsibility of the state.<sup>48</sup> This constitution was passed after the CFA, implying that the Egyptian government is constitutionally bound not to compromise on securing Egypt's "historic rights". This is in direct contrast with the post-CFA reality from Ethiopia's viewpoint and, by extension, constitutes an anti-Ethiopian foreign policy because it directly threatens what Ethiopia considers its national interests. In essence, to a reasonable degree, Ethiopia anticipates the deployment by Egypt of instruments of statecraft that may undermine its GERD project.

Political tensions between Egypt and Ethiopia reached its peak in May-June 2013, when the Nile water was diverted in preparation for the GERD's construction. Indications were leaked of the intent of the then Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi to enter into arms deal with the Ethiopian opposition to deter Ethiopia and sabotage the GERD.<sup>49</sup> This was an extension of former President Hosni Mubarak's Nile policy.<sup>50</sup> In 2013 Egypt threatened to use force withdrew from the ministerial rounds of negotiations in January 2014. It did not take long for Egypt to realise that its withdrawal left it at somewhat of a disadvantage. The tensions remained and were only reduced when President Morsi was ousted in 2013. Notably, talks about bombing the GERD had surfaced in 2010 in a dispatch involving a high-level Egyptian security/intel source who is in regular direct contact with Hosni Mubarak and Omar Suleiman, then intelligence head. It referenced a similar action by Egypt

<sup>47</sup> Yacob Arsano, *Ethiopia and the Nile. Dilemmas of National and Regional Hydropolitics*, Zurich, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, 2007, [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/31559/Ethiopia\\_and\\_the\\_Nil\\_compl.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/31559/Ethiopia_and_the_Nil_compl.pdf); Ineke Mules, "Tensions escalate between Ethiopia and Sudan", in *Deutsche Welle*, 19 January 2021, <https://p.dw.com/p/3o7AI>.

<sup>48</sup> Egypt, *Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt*, 18 January 2014, <https://www.sis.gov.eg/section/10/206>.

<sup>49</sup> Rawia Tawfik, "Reconsidering Counter-hegemonic Dam Projects: The Case of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam", in *Water Policy*, Vol. 18, No. 5 (October 2016), p. 1033-1052.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

in the 1970s. The quote goes thus,

The only country that is not cooperating is Ethiopia. We are continuing to talk to them, using the diplomatic approach. Yes, we are discussing military cooperation with Sudan. [...] If it comes to a crisis, we will send a jet to bomb the dam and come back in one day, simple as that. Or we can send our special forces in to block/sabotage the dam [...]. Look back to an operation Egypt did in the mid-late 1970s, I think 1976, when Ethiopia was trying to build a large dam. We blew up the equipment while it was traveling by sea to Ethiopia.<sup>51</sup>

Although the nature of Ethiopian-Egyptian relations with respect to the GERD is adversarial, both countries have remained open to having talks on points of agreement; for instance, in August 2014 the irrigation ministers of both countries agreed to constitute a Tripartite National Committee made up of twelve Egyptian, Sudanese and Ethiopian experts to implement the recommendations of the International Panel of Experts with the aid of an international consulting company.

This move also reflected Ethiopia's and Egypt's attempt to keep Sudan close. Ethiopia and Egypt have both attempted to counter each other's growing cooperation with Sudan using military cooperation. Ethiopia signed an agreement with Sudan to establish a joint military force for border security in January 2014. Egypt later signed an agreement with Sudan in March 2014 to strengthen Sudan's military capacity.

Although Ethiopia and Sudan have had a longstanding relationship over the centuries, disputes over water emerged as early as the 19th century, mixed with land and religious conflicts.<sup>52</sup> Sudan's geography as a downstream state, alongside colonial legacies and religious differences have all contributed to a strained relationship with Ethiopia.<sup>53</sup> In recent times, closer (especially military) ties with Egypt raises eyebrows.<sup>54</sup> Also, cordiality between both countries have been unstable. Meles Zenawi cultivated close ties with Al-Bashir. Within this context, Al-Bashir supported Ethiopia to isolate Eritrea and build the GERD, which is just about 20 km from the Sudanese border.<sup>55</sup> Meles Zenawi's administration also supported the Sudanese Government and the Southern Sudan Administration to peacefully

<sup>51</sup> Michael B. Kelley and Robert Johnson, "STRATFOR: Egypt Is Prepared to Bomb All of Ethiopia's Nile Dams", in *Insider*, 13 October 2012, <https://www.businessinsider.com/hacked-stratfor-emails-egypt-could-take-military-action-to-protect-its-stake-in-the-nile-2012-10>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.; also see Abel Abate Demissie et al., "Africa Aware: Relations between Ethiopia and Sudan", in *Chatham House Africa Podcasts*, 9 April 2022, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/node/28691>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> See Mohamed Saied, "Egypt Deepens Military Ties with Sudan as Ethiopia Moves Forward with Nile Dam", in *Al-Monitor*, 22 March 2022, <https://www.al-monitor.com/node/47721>.

<sup>55</sup> Belete Belachew Yihun, "Ethiopia's Troubled Relations with the Sudan, 1956-1983", in *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1-2 (2016), p. 67-88.

resolve the crisis.<sup>56</sup> Despite these, the ties between both countries did not enjoy continuity. After a brief diplomatic romance between Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, there was a downturn. Lack of communication and Sudan's alleged interference in the Tigray crisis is blamed for this.<sup>57</sup> At this juncture, it would be vital to recall that the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the TPLF-dominated Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government of Ethiopia have a cordial history with Sudan's military and political officers which impacts the conflict-cooperation oscillation between Ethiopia and Sudan.<sup>58</sup> This is also a factor to consider when examining the context of the Tigray and GERD/Nile issues as it concerns Sudan.

Furthermore, both countries are on opposite ends of border disputes that are somewhat (politically) intertwined with the GERD crisis.<sup>59</sup> There is contention over the demarcation and management of al-Fashaga borderlands (referred to as Mazega in Ethiopia) in relation to the 1902 Anglo-Ethiopian treaty. Although a compromise was reached in 2007, Sudan's sudden claim to the land amidst the GERD crisis with the Ethiopian forces focussing on the Tigray crisis makes Ethiopia suspicious.<sup>60</sup>

Ethiopia has growing concerns about its national security concerning possible Egyptian involvement with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and Gumuz rebels.<sup>61</sup> These crises are entry points that serve the interest of downstream states if they succeed in their political objective.<sup>62</sup> The outbreak of armed rebellion undermines the Ethiopian government from within. An example is the TPLF. Another example is the Gumuz People's Democratic Movement (GPDM). Benishangul-Gumuz, where the latter is based, is home to the GERD. The threat these militias pose puts Ethiopia at risk of state collapse. While evidence of the interference of downstream states' involvement is anecdotal at best, the Ethiopian government has directly accused the Egyptian government of sponsoring and directly contacting the GPDM's leadership.<sup>63</sup> The broader ramification of the success

<sup>56</sup> Tesfa Alem Tekle, "Ethiopia PM, U.S. Senator Hold Talks on South Sudan Referendum", in *Sudan Tribune*, 8 November 2010, <https://sudantribune.com/article36579>.

<sup>57</sup> See International Crisis Group, "Containing the Volatile Sudan-Ethiopia Border Dispute", in *ICG Africa Briefings*, No. 173 (24 June 2021), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/node/16884>; and Mohamed Saied, "Ethiopia-Sudan Tension Rises over Tigray Conflict", in *Al-Monitor*, 10 August 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/node/44109>.

<sup>58</sup> John Young, "Conflict and Cooperation: Transitions in Modern Ethiopian-Sudanese Relations", in *HSBA Briefing Papers*, May 2020, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/node/5632>.

<sup>59</sup> Abel Abate Demissie et al., "Africa Aware: Relations between Ethiopia and Sudan", cit.

<sup>60</sup> "Ethiopia Warns Sudan It Is Running Out of Patience over Border Dispute", in *Reuters*, 12 January 2021, <https://reut.rs/3bxbesd>. Also see "Egypt, Sudan Conclude Joint Military Drill amid Tensions with Ethiopia", in *Africanews*, 1 June 2021, <https://www.africanews.com/2021/06/01/egypt-sudan-conclude-joint-military-drill-amid-tensions-with-ethiopia>.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with a Horn of Africa regional expert, 26 January 2022.

<sup>62</sup> It is the opinion of some Ethiopian country experts based on evidence available to them that Egypt and Sudan's actions (overt or covert) tend towards state collapse rather than reform or reinvention of the Ethiopian state.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with an Ethiopia country expert, 11 February 2022. Also see "Ethiopian Official Claims Egypt behind 'Destabilisation' Campaign", in *Africanews*, 24 January 2021, <https://www.africanews>.

of the rebels is its direct impact on the GERD. Therefore, Ethiopia's scepticism is not far-fetched. Specifically, Ethiopia's suspicion of Egypt might not be misplaced because Egypt has a history of armed action to hinder dam construction in Ethiopia dating from the 1970s.<sup>64</sup>

The Western (donor) community has demonstrated some degree of bias in failing to play the role of neutral arbitrator which ought to be a priority on the basis of the fact that there is evidence of US' support for TPLF in the past.<sup>65</sup> The US's mediation was shrouded in uncertainty because of the sanctions imposed by Trump against Ethiopia halting foreign aid to Addis Ababa.<sup>66</sup> While some sanctions are still in place, the US announced its de-link from its policy towards Ethiopia's GERD.<sup>67</sup> The draft agreement prepared by the US and the World Bank in 2020 was also problematic for Ethiopia. The US contradicted Ethiopia's GERD policy by requesting that the filling of the dam be put on hold until an agreement was signed. However, the US attempt to change the direction of Ethiopia's GERD policy failed. Given the colonial nature of the origin of "historic rights" claimed by the downstream states and of the 1902, 1929, and 1959 agreements, this sort of interference creates distrust that such actors will attempt to continue the pre-CFA order, which Ethiopia vehemently opposes.

While Ethiopia maintains the African Solutions to African Problems (AfSol) principle, Egypt and Sudan have gone to Brussels and Moscow, respectively, mobilising diplomatic contacts to support its position.<sup>68</sup> European involvement, so far, has mostly been through the European Union which plays a rather observer role in the GERD crisis/talks. The EU has remained vocal about a positive outcome for all parties and its interest to be involved in the negotiations, especially in terms of engaging the three parties (Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan).<sup>69</sup> In July 2021, for example, the EU's interest in a peaceful resolution over the GERD was substantiated. The European Parliament presented an in-depth analysis on climate changed-induced security threats to Europe. The report highlighted that Egypt will not be affected by the GERD except there is a prolonged drought. It also indicated that the EU needs

[com/2021/01/24/ethiopian-official-claims-egypt-behind-destabilisation-campaign.](https://www.commonspace.eu/node/10617)

<sup>64</sup> See Mohamed Maher, "Navigating the Ongoing Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Negotiations", in *Fikra Forum*, 29 September 2021, <https://bit.ly/3F2WaPy>.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with an environment and development expert, 9 February 2022. Aregawi Berhe, "The EPRDF and the Crisis of the Ethiopian State", in *International Conference on African Development Archives*, No. 5 (August 2001), p. 2-4, [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/africancenter\\_icad\\_archive/5](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/africancenter_icad_archive/5).

<sup>66</sup> See Robbie Gramer, "U.S. Halts Some Foreign Assistance Funding to Ethiopia over Dam Dispute with Egypt, Sudan", in *Foreign Policy*, 27 August 2020, <https://bit.ly/2YILz8S>.

<sup>67</sup> "U.S. to De-Link Ethiopian Aid Pause from Dam Policy", in *Reuters*, 20 February 2021, <https://reut.rs/37zqCBI>.

<sup>68</sup> See "GERD Crisis: After the Security Council, Egypt Heads to Brussels", in *commonsplace.eu*, 8 July 2021, <https://www.commonspace.eu/node/10617>.

<sup>69</sup> Nicola Farina, "The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the Water Diplomacy of the European Union", in *A Path for Europe*, 8 August 2020, <https://pathforeurope.eu/?p=3786>, also see Al-Masry Al-Youm, "EU Ready to Contribute to Solving GERD Crisis: Neighborhood Commissioner", in *Egypt Independent*, 7 June 2022, <https://egyptindependent.com/?p=2700731>; and "EU Says Ready to Engage More to Reach Agreement on GERD", in *Ahram Online*, 1 March 2022, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/462057.aspx>.

to be more proactive on the GERD crisis due to its link with climate security and humanitarian impact.<sup>70</sup> However, Ethiopia's resolute for an AU-led peace process and the AfSol principle is a sign of prospective limitations to the extent to which the EU can impact the GERD talks in terms of having all parties reaching agreeable terms. This reflects in Ethiopia's rejection of Sudan's proposal to include the EU in negotiations.

Efforts by Ethiopia to ensure that UK, Sudan and Egypt or any of its allies in Europe do not play a determining role by being less open-minded stifles the EU's efforts. There is also a normative debate on the fact that, first, when the imbalanced water sharing formula existed in favour of downstream states, there was little or no concrete effort to support a more equitable formula. Second, the statement of the EU's spokesperson on the filling of the Dam on 8 July 2021 reiterated the allegation of Ethiopia's unilateral action concerning the GERD – a term Ethiopia is displeased with.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, Egypt's cordiality with the EU is also a factor to consider in terms of Ethiopia's perception of how neutral the EU can be.<sup>72</sup>

Amidst Ethiopia's (non)acceptance of EU's involvement, European states like Germany has distanced itself from allegations that it invested in the GERD which Egypt formally protested against.<sup>73</sup> Others have tried to maintain neutrality.<sup>74</sup> However, there has been private sector involvement of European states – not necessarily state-sanctioned. For example, two French consulting groups were agreed upon by Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan to study the Dam's impact in 2016.<sup>75</sup> Germany's Voith signed an agreement to supply Ethiopia with 13 of the 16 turbines Ethiopia needs; and Salini Impregilo (now known as Webuild), an Italian firm, was the main (civil) contractor in charge of the Dam construction.<sup>76</sup> Although questions may arise in the near future as to whether these companies are being used as

<sup>70</sup> Dimitrios Kantemnidis, "Europe Can Help Prevent a 'Water War' over Ethiopia's Nile Dam", in *#CriticalThinking*, 12 July 2021, <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/europe-can-help-prevent-a-water-war-over-ethiopia-nile-dam>.

<sup>71</sup> European Union External Action Service (EEAS), *Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: Statement by the Spokesperson on the Announcement of the Second Filling*, 8 July 2021, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/101507>.

<sup>72</sup> See "Ethiopia Categorically Rejects EU Statement on GERD Crisis, Describing as 'Biased'", in *Egypt Independent*, 24 June 2022, <https://egyptindependent.com/?p=2703056>; and Getahun Tsegaye, "News: EU Should Reconsider Biased Stance on Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: MoFA", in *Addis Standard*, 23 June 2022, <https://addisstandard.com/?p=27749>.

<sup>73</sup> See Taha Sakr, "German Government Has Nothing to Do with GERD Construction: Ambassador Hartmann", in *Daily News Egypt*, 21 September 2021, <https://dailynewsegypt.com/?p=766711>.

<sup>74</sup> See for example, the statement delivered by Permanent Representative Ambassador Mona Juul in a Security Council meeting: see UN Security Council, *8816th Meeting: Peace and Security in Africa (S/PV.8816)*, 8 July 2021, p. 9, <https://undocs.org/en/S/PV.8816>.

<sup>75</sup> See Rod Sweet, "French Firm Picked to Study Ethiopia's Mega Dam as Uneasy Truce Holds", in *Global Construction Review*, 21 January 2016, <https://www.globalconstructionreview.com/french-firm-picked-stu7dy-ethiop7ias-me7ga-da7m>.

<sup>76</sup> See "Germany's Voith to Supply More Turbines for Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam", in *Reuters*, 17 October 2018, <https://reut.rs/2yMSr74>; and "Webuild CEO Says Honored to Partake in GERD Construction", in *Ethiopian Monitor*, 20 February 2022, <https://ethiopianmonitor.com/?p=24069>.

foreign policy tools for their respective countries or not. Although, evidence as of yet does not suggest such.

A foreign actor that also avoided being caught up in the intra-regional scuffle is Russia, which became active in diplomatic attempts at enhancing multilateral cooperation in 2021, emphasising its support for an AU-led initiative. Russia has maintained a non-interference policy in dealing with the concerned parties bilaterally and at the multilateral level.<sup>77</sup> In July 2021, Egypt perceived Russia as biased towards Ethiopia but the mistrust did not escalate as Russia bolstered cooperation in other areas.<sup>78</sup>

Historically, the Western actors have been the predominant external actors. However, China, India, the Arab League and Gulf states as investors in recent times have affected the balance of cooperation in the region. They have served as alternatives to Western donors who have been very slow to offer loans to upstream countries for water projects.<sup>79</sup> Such loan alternatives include a private Chinese investment loan of 269.4 million US dollars and other hydro-project investments for upstream countries Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, the DRC and Uganda.<sup>80</sup> This alternative is even more attractive as upstream countries are not concerned about China's political interference in internal politics. In this way, upstream countries have received enough support to challenge Egypt's hydro-hegemony. In contrast, Egypt has the international financial institutions (IFIs) on its side.<sup>81</sup>

### Conclusion

Ethiopia's foreign and security policy are a continuation of its developmental pursuits (electrification) since the 1960s, which are now defined in terms of an imperative to complete the GERD. Successive Ethiopian governments have been unwilling to compromise due to political, security and developmental expediency. In addition, upstream states are more likely to back Ethiopia's GERD policy because it captures the new order that allows them more access to use the Nile waters as opposed to what was obtainable before the 2010 CFA was signed. While internal

<sup>77</sup> Russia offered technical assistance to Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan. See Sarah El-Sheikh, "Russia Offers Technical Assistance to 3 Countries in Ethiopian Dam Negotiations", in *Daily News Egypt*, 8 July 2020, <https://dailynewsegyp.com/?p=735612>.

<sup>78</sup> See this policy analysis on Russia's involvement in the GERD crisis: Samuel Ramani, "Russia and the GERD: An Uneasy Balancing Act", in *MEI Articles*, 16 August 2021, <https://www.mei.edu/node/83239>.

<sup>79</sup> Jack Kalpakian, "Ethiopia and the Blue Nile: Development Plans and Their Implications Downstream", in *ASPJ Africa and Francophonie*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2nd Quarter 2015), p. 40-57, [https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/ASPJ\\_French/journals\\_E/Volume-06\\_Issue-2/kalpakian\\_e.pdf](https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/ASPJ_French/journals_E/Volume-06_Issue-2/kalpakian_e.pdf).

<sup>80</sup> Mahlakeng Khosi Mahlakeng, "China and the Nile River Basin: The Changing Hydropolitical Status Quo", in *Insight on Africa*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (January 2018), p. 73-97.

<sup>81</sup> These IFIs include the World Bank which will not assist the GERD construction without Egypt's endorsement, and the European Investment Bank.

crises and border dispute with Sudan are reasons to be sceptical of Egypt and Sudan in case of any agreement, how Ethiopia perceives proposed agreements before and after the signing of the CFA will determine whether the talks will remain stalled or can advance. A silver lining is that Addis Ababa is open to AU-led initiatives.

Ethiopia will continue to oppose a return of the old order (pre-CFA Agreement), consolidate its newfound and desired hydro-hegemonic status, and pursue socioeconomic development through wider electrification. Ethiopia's GERD policy is a move beyond "political lamentations and deep-seated sense of exclusion".<sup>82</sup> The GERD represents Ethiopia's most significant move on the use of the Nile to its benefit, and in its aftermath Egypt and Sudan explored diplomatic means to impede funding for the GERD.<sup>83</sup> Thus, the diplomatic impasse provides leverage for Ethiopia and a counter-hegemonic context constraining Egypt.

Ethiopia is not suffering from a significant setback from the impasse and may therefore be unconcerned about the implications of the finalisation of the GERD, as has been the case within the last decade. Although the technical cooperation under the NBI and political negotiations under the CFA recorded success and reduced the chances of direct confrontation, reaching an agreeable permanent legal and institutional framework among the riparian states has remained and will remain a challenge from Ethiopia's viewpoint.<sup>84</sup> The various proposals in this regard are significantly judged (by Ethiopia) based on their alignment with the post-CFA order. Thus, Ethiopia will oppose any position that seeks to further the letter and the intent of the 1902, 1929 and 1959 agreements.

### Policy recommendations

#### *The international community*

- There is a need to de-internationalise the GERD talks to the barest minimum. The context of the GERD crisis is such that engaging more actors beyond the riparian states is more likely to impede the peace process. The multiplicity of actors from outside Africa beyond observer status has proven detrimental to the success of talks. Ethiopia does not support the past bias of Western actors and the Arab League. The involvement of Eastern actors like China is likely to invite countermoves by their Western counterparts. This escalates the tension and politicking beyond the riparian states who are the primary stakeholders, by potentially pitching power blocs against each other over the Nile rather than seeking means through which the technicalities of the filling and operation of the dam can be resolved.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with an Ethiopia country expert, 11 February 2022.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with an environment and development expert, 9 February 2022.

<sup>84</sup> Ana Elisa Cascão and Alan Nicol, "GERD: New Norms of Cooperation in the Nile Basin?", in *Water International*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2016), p. 550-573.



- Perceived nationalistic bias unfavourable to Ethiopia which seems to dominate academic and policy discourse, and its suspected adoption by external actors, impedes the popularity of a mutual agreement in Ethiopia's policy and academic space. Therefore, there is a need to promote balance in knowledge production as regards the GERD and refocus research agendas towards solving the impasse rather than framing either of the parties as the obstacle to a mutual agreement.

### *Riparian states*

- Building mutual trust is a starting point for all parties. Instead of picking sides or adding to the existing frame of distrust, all riparian states could explore their bilateral relations with others within the region to enhance cooperation and reach agreeable terms.
- While Egypt needs to tone down its constitutional rigidity on the Nile policy (with the GERD benefits in sight), Ethiopia's GERD policy needs to demonstrate that it understands and appreciates Egypt's Nile dependence and vulnerability.

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