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**UNITED NATIONS
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**COOPERATION FOR THE NILE WATER DEVELOPMENT
ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

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**COOPERATION FOR THE NILE WATER DEVELOPMENT:
ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

Introduction

1. The Nile is one of the few international rivers in the world which is historically, culturally and economically linked to so many civilizations dating as far back as the pharonic ages some 5000 years ago. Civilization after civilization have been built, destroyed and rebuilt on the banks of the Nile on different reaches of the river beginning from its source in the Central African highlands to where it blends into the Mediterranean Sea near Cairo, Egypt. Over the centuries, peoples of different caste, creeds and religions along the 6700 km length of the river depended on and exploited the resources of the Nile - some during the pagan ages even worshipped the river referring to it as their Nile god. Legend has it that when the Nile flood was optimal and replenished their crop and with required water and nutrient, the people of ancient rural Egypt celebrated their bounty and when the Nile floods were excessive and destroyed their crops and properties, they drowned the most beautiful young virgin girl of their community in the river believing that she was being married to their Nile god in order to placate its anger. Rumour has it that the ritual is still practised in some rural areas - only a dummy is used in the place of a live girl. Oblivious to their needs and beliefs, the Nile continued to flow eternally almost uninterrupted for centuries. It is only in the 18th and the 19th Century that serious geographical and scientific investigations as to the source and flow regime of the river took place and it is only in the 20th Century that significant man-made measures were undertaken to control or tame the river in order to derive maximum benefits from its water resources.

The Nile River Regime

2. The Nile is one of the longest rivers in the world. Its nearly 6,700 km journey begins in the Equatorial lake basin in the Central African Highlands where one of the two main branches of Nile i.e. the White Nile originates. The other major branch - commonly referred to as the Blue Nile originates from near Lake Tana in the Ethiopian highland plateau. During the course of its journey, the river drains a catchment area of over 3 million square kilometres

covering land areas in as many as eleven sovereign states namely, Burundi, the Central African Republic, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, the Sudan, and Egypt (Figure 1). The Equatorial lake basin contributes some sixteen billion cubic meters of water to the White Nile while the Blue Nile from the Ethiopian highlands contributes almost 54 billion cubic meters. The other two small rivers, i.e. the Sobat and the Atbara from this later basin contributes another 26 billion cubic meters to the Nile. The rough equivalents of these flows at Aswan are 12 billion cubic meters per year from the Equatorial lakes basin and the Southern Sudan and 72 billion cubic meters per year from the Ethiopian highlands for a total yield from the Nile at Aswan of 84 billion cubic meters per year.

International Agreements on the Nile Issue

3. Intercountry cooperation for integrated development and sharing of the Nile waters began as early as 1890s. In 1891, Britain representing Egypt and the Sudan and Italy representing Eritrea signed an agreement in Rome delineating the spheres of their respective influence and demarcating the borders between Eritrea and the Sudan. In 1902, Ethiopia and Britain signed an agreement in Addis Ababa relative to the frontiers between Ethiopia and the Sudan and stipulating agreement relative to the maintenance of Nile flow. In 1906, Britain and Belgium (representing the Congo) signed an agreement in London stipulating similar arrangements relative to the waters of the Semilike and Isango rivers flowing into the lake Albert. In 1925, Britain and Italy signed another agreement which Ethiopia did not agree to and lodged a complaint to the then League of Nations.

4. In 1929, an "agreement on the use of the Nile waters was concluded between Egypt and Great Britain, the latter representing Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and the Sudan. This agreement was concluded by an exchange of letters between the Egyptian Prime Minister and the British Ambassador in Egypt on May 7, 1929 in Cairo. In the background of the Agreement, Egypt was allocated 48 billion cu.m. per year of Nile waters as its acquired right while that of the Sudan was 4 billion cu.m. per year. This was based on the report of the commission appointed by Egypt which produced a detailed report in 1925 providing a technical basis for the 1929 agreement." (K. Achamyeh)

on behalf of ECA, 1995). In 1959, Sudan and Egypt signed an agreement "for full utilization of the Nile Waters" within the two countries and for increasing its yield. A technical body named Permanent Joint Technical Commission (PJTC) was formed by the two countries to carry out research, study and hydrological survey on the Nile and for planning and supervision of implementation, operation and administration of projects to increase the water yield of the Nile (K. Achamyeleh 1995).

Intercountry/Interagency Cooperation on the Nile Waters

5. Prior to 1960s, most agreements (except the 1929 Nile Waters Agreement) dealing with development and uses of the Nile waters have been on bilateral basis. From 1960s onward, a number of UN and other international agencies took initiatives to promote intercountry cooperation among the Nile riparian countries. In 1967, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) initiated a project for the hydrometeorological survey of the Equatorial Lakes basin. The Project called "Hydromet Project" was signed by Egypt, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania in 1967. Later, the project was extended to include the Nile basin in Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. From 1971, Ethiopia attended the regular meetings of the Hydromet Project as an observer. The major achievements of the Project have been hydro-meteorological data collection for over a period of twenty five years; training of technical staff from the member countries; and providing a forum for the Nile basin countries to come together and discuss issues relative to the Nile basin development. In 1992, a ministerial meeting of the Nile riparian countries hosted by the Ugandan Government and Co-sponsored by Egypt, the Hydromet Project and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) established a "Technical Cooperation Committee for Promotion of Development and Environmental Protection of the Nile basin (Tecconile), more or less replacing the old Hydromet Project. The objectives of Tecconile were to assist the member countries in developing national water master plans, infrastructures, capacity building; and to promote intercountry cooperation for integrated and sustainable development and equitable uses of the Nile waters by the riparian countries.

The Kagera River Basin Agreement

6. The Kagera river basin is the only sub-basin in the Nile river system outside of the two lower riparian countries i.e. Egypt and the Sudan that has a cooperative arrangements based on all aspects of water resources of this sub-basin. The Kagera basin agreement was signed by Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania after a study financed by the UNDP on utilization of resources of the Kagera river basin and preparation of a basin plan in two phases between 1971 and 1976. The three countries established the Kagera Basin Organization (KBO) in 1977. Uganda joined KBO in 1981.

UNDP Initiative on the Nile Basin

7. In 1986, the UNDP and the Secretariat of the Mekong River Commission organized in Bangkok, Thailand a meeting for the senior officials from the Nile river basin countries. Representatives (mostly at ministerial levels) from eight Nile countries attended the meeting. The objective of the meeting was to assist the Nile countries to gain from the experiences of the Mekong river countries in development and management of sharedwater resources. A number of African transboundary river basin organizations and the PJTC also attended the meeting. One of the recommendations of the meeting was for the Nile basin countries to meet periodically at the ministerial level to strengthen cooperation among themselves.

Role of Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

8. In 1987, ECA in collaboration with the UNDP organized "Identification Missions" to eight Nile riparian countries (not including Ethiopia) primarily to explain and to convince the countries to agree on the idea of mounting a fact-finding mission to these countries" (K. Achamyeleh 1995). During these missions, some of the countries visited emphasized the need for a ministerial meeting. Accordingly, in 1998 an informal ministerial consultation of the Nile basin countries was held in Niamey, Niger during the 14th annual meeting of the ECA Conference of Ministers. This informal consultation requested ECA to convene a full fledged ministerial meeting in 1989. Accordingly, ECA organized in 1989 a full fledged ministerial meeting of Nile river countries in Addis Ababa. This meeting requested ECA/UNDP to mount a fact-finding

mission to selected Nile basin countries in collaboration with the "Hydromet Project" secretariat. The fact finding mission was fielded in May-June 1989 and its report entitled "Nile Basin Integrated Development" was prepared in July 1989 which was discussed and reviewed by an extraordinary meeting of experts from the Nile countries organized by ECA in Addis Ababa in October 1989.

The UNDUGU Initiative

9. Even before these above-noted activities were undertaken, ECA had been involved in the Nile basin issues under the auspices of the UNDUGU initiative. UNDUGU - a Kiswahili word for brotherhood - was an informal group set up in 1983 - mostly by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs from the Nile river basin countries. Mr. Boutros Boutros Ghali - the then Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt who had been a prime-mover of the UNDUGU Group requested ECA to provide secretariat services to the Group. The objectives of the UNDUGU Group had been to promote political, economic, social and cultural cooperation among the Nile basin countries to ensure integrated and harmonious development of natural resources including water resources of the basin including water resources. Since 1983, ECA organized and serviced a number of expert and Ministerial level meetings of the UNDUGU Group usually in conjunction with the annual meetings of the Conference of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). In 1989, ECA coordinated in collaboration with the UNDP and under the auspices of the UNDUGU, a high level mission of two experts headed by Ambassador Paul Mark Henry of France to four UNDUGU member States. The report of this mission which was dubbed as a framework for a masterplan for integrated development of natural resources and infrastructures in the Nile basin was submitted to the sixth ministerial meeting of the UNDUGU Group in February 1990. This meeting requested the ECA and the UNDP to prepare a summary of the Paul Mark Henry report and convene a meeting of experts from the Nile basin countries to review the report and recommend subsequent actions by the following ministerial meeting. ECA organized this expert meeting in July 1990.

10. The eighth (8th) ministerial meeting of the UNDUGU Group in 1991 decided that the Group should have a framework for cooperation among its member states and requested ECA to prepare such a framework. ECA

Accordingly, engaged an outside consultant (a Kenyan citizen) to prepare such a cooperation framework. ECA then convened, organized and serviced a meeting of experts from the UNDUGU member States in November 1992. The Government of Egypt hosted this meeting in Cairo. This meeting agreed on one of the three alternatives for cooperation initially suggested by the consultant and later extensively modified by the member States of the Group. The mode of cooperation selected by this expert group meeting was a flexible arrangement through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). One of the major elements of this MOU was the proposal for constituting a "Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs" from the UNDUGU member States (all Nile river basin countries). The MOU also provided for establishing a follow-up committee of Ambassadors supported by a Technical Committee of experts and a permanent secretariat for the UNDUGU Group.

11. This agreed-upon MOU was subsequently submitted to the tenth (10th) ministerial meeting of the UNDUGU Group organized by ECA at Addis Ababa in February 1993. This ministerial meeting decided to defer further consideration of this MOU until the political and economic experts in each member State of the Group had an opportunity to review the same (MOU).

12. Meanwhile, in 1995, ECA engaged another outside consultant (an Ethiopian citizen) who prepared a comprehensive study on "Problems and prospects for intercountry cooperation for integrated water resources development of the Nile river basin". This study provides a comprehensive review of historical aspects of international (intercountry) agreements in the Nile basin. It further provides a brief overview of socio-economic conditions in these countries and elaborates on various positions of different Nile riparian countries on integrated development of its water resources. The study also reviews various initiatives over the years by the UN and other international agencies. The study finally offers a number of recommendations for enhancing intercountry cooperation for integrated development and equitable uses of the Nile waters by its riparian countries.

Current Cooperation Initiatives

13. A number of cooperation initiatives in the Nile river basin are currently underway. These are initiatives sponsored and supported by a number UN

agencies such as the WMO, UNESCO, ECA and others and by donor countries such as Canada and others. Notable among these initiatives are the Nile-Hycos project by WMO, and the FRIEND project by UNESCO both of which deal with hydro-meteorological data collection in the basin for water resources assessment. ECA is currently working in collaboration with the Government of Canada in developing a strategy for further ECA involvement in the Nile water issues.

14. The Nile 2002 initiatives supported by the Government of Canada started in 1993 with its first conference held in Aswan, Egypt. This initiative planned for a series of ten (10) annual meetings - one in each Nile riparian countries. So far meetings were held in Egypt (1993), Sudan (1994), Tanzania (1995), Uganda (1996), Ethiopia (1997), Rwanda (1998) and Egypt again in 1999. The objectives of these meetings are to provide informal, venues for exchanging technical data and information and to foster cooperation for the Nile basin development. ECA provided logistic and substantive supports to the Government of Ethiopia when the later hosted the 5th of the Nile 2002 Series of meetings in Addis-Ababa in 1997.

15. One of the major current cooperation initiatives in the Nile river basin is by the Nile riparian countries themselves. In the last two years or so several Nile basin countries established a Council of Ministers (COM) of water resources from their respective countries. Several meetings of COM took place - the last ones being in Arusha (November 1998) and Dar-es-Salaam (February 1999), Tanzania which was the Chairman of the Council on rotational basis. Ethiopia resumed the Chairmanship of COM as of February 1999 and will host its next meeting in Addis Ababa in May 1999. The World Bank is providing technical and financial support to the activities of COM. The World Bank under this initiative is planning to convene and organize a major ministerial level consultation-cum-Donors' Conference sometime early next year. ECA and the World Bank agreed to collaborate with each other on this major initiative and the conferences will be held at the ECA headquarters in Addis Ababa.

Conclusions and Recommendations

16. The Nile is a precious gift of God to some 250 million people that inhabit the eleven sovereign countries sharing the catchment area of the river. At the current rate of population increase, this number is estimated to approach one billion in about fifty years from now (2050). The Nile, although one with the lowest specific water yield compared to other major international rivers in the world, holds great potential in terms of natural resources including its water resources. These resources when fully developed on integrated basis could significantly improve the socio-economic conditions of the people in the basin. The shared river basin could also be used as a common precinct for enhancing political, social, cultural and economic cooperation among the countries sharing the basin in true spirit of the word UNDUGU - meaning brotherhood.

17. Efforts to date to develop the resources of the basin - particularly its water resources - has been rather on ad-hoc and sporadic basis and did not enjoy the support and participation of all the riparian countries. For example, most of the intercountry agreements on the Nile water issue have been on bilateral basis. Similarly, efforts by the international community (both international organizations and the donor countries) in promoting cooperation for integrated development of the basin also lacked coordination and harmonization and did not produce the expected impact. There are many other reasons for lack of progress in integrated development of the basin. These range from political differences to diverse level of economic and technological development among the riparian countries.

18. Concerted efforts with full support and participation by all riparian countries are needed for full and integrated development of water resources of the Nile. In this respect, comprehensive agreements by all concerned countries for equitable sharing, effective and efficient uses of the Nile water is most desirable. An effective cooperation mechanism with participation by all riparian countries will facilitate and enhance the pace of development in this regard.

19. Better coordination and harmonization of efforts by the external support agencies including the international, regional, and subregional organizations are

needed to produce desired impacts of their activities in promoting intercountry cooperation for full and integrated development of the Nile water resources.

20. As per as possible and practicable, the politics of water should be separated from the politics of ideology, trade and other socio-economic and cultural differences among the Nile basin countries. Indeed, cooperation on water issues should be as far as possible, independent of other differences among the countries. The objectives of such cooperation should be to increase the yearly water yield of the river, minimize waste or losses, efficient water uses, and of course to ensure equitable sharing of these common resources. The ultimate objective should be full and integrated development of the Nile waters for the benefit of people in all the Nile basin countries.