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Water Politics: A Case Study of Hydro Politics Among Nile River Stakeholders

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Badradin Mohammed

Abstract

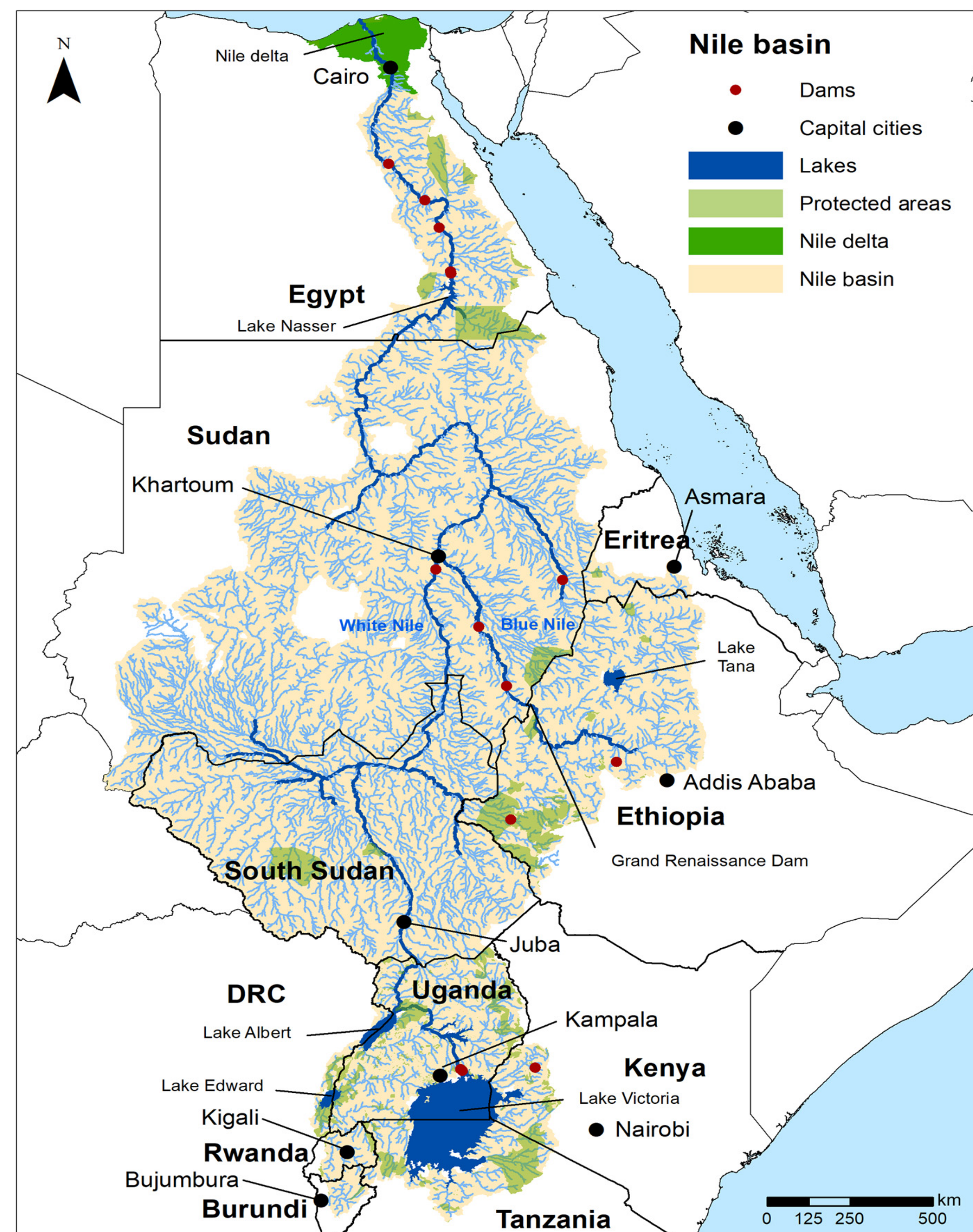
Access to water is a critical aspect of human survival; we have seen an increased tension over transboundary water over the years. In the northeast of Africa, the Nile River is among the most vital source of water and a source of conflict among three of its major riparian countries (Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia). For downstream states (Egypt and Sudan), the river serves as a lifeline, but for upstream states (rest of equatorial states), it provides an opportunity for economic growth. Historically Egypt has been the regional hydro-hegemon in the Nile Basin through historical treaties and agreements. However, the independence of Nile Basin countries in the mid-1900s has allowed upstream states to reassert their rights and establish equal control and benefits from the Nile River. International efforts to establish a legal structure since the 1900s was unsuccessful and has done little to convince downstream countries to agree on any legal framework. While no direct military confrontation between any of the beneficiaries of the Nile River has occurred, studies have predicted that the recent disputes between Ethiopia and Egypt over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is likely to lead to armed conflict. This study explores the trilateral disputes over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam involving Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan by examining the following research question: Under what conditions can Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan work to resolve their disputes over the Nile River in the absence of legal framework? The study suggests that while there is a possibility of direct arm conflict, it is unlikely that it will occur because any military confrontation between any of these states will result in a costly regional crisis and will supersede peace resolution of the ongoing disputes.

Research Objectives

This case study presents an important issue in the Nile River Basin which may threaten water availability and increase the possibility of a conflict. The case will:

- ❖ Increase awareness of water issues in the Nile basin and around the world
- ❖ Increase understanding of the various factors that lead to water conflict
- ❖ Provide readers with a new perspective on natural resources disputes

Background



Historical claims by major actors:

- ❖ 1902 Treaty between Great Britain and Ethiopia stated that Ethiopia, would not allow any construction work across the Blue Nile, Lake Tana, or the Sobat
- ❖ 1929 Nile Agreement between Egypt and Anglo-Egyptian Sudan gave Egypt complete control over the Nile during the dry season and the right to monitor the availability of the Nile of the upstream countries.
- ❖ 1959 Nile Agreement between Sudan and Egypt was for full control over the utilization of the Nile water in terms of equal allotment of the annual flow of the Nile, hydroelectric or irrigation construction projects, etc.
- ❖ 1999 Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) was formed with the primary goal to create sustainable socio-economic development through equitable utilization of and, benefit from, the common Nile Basin water resources.

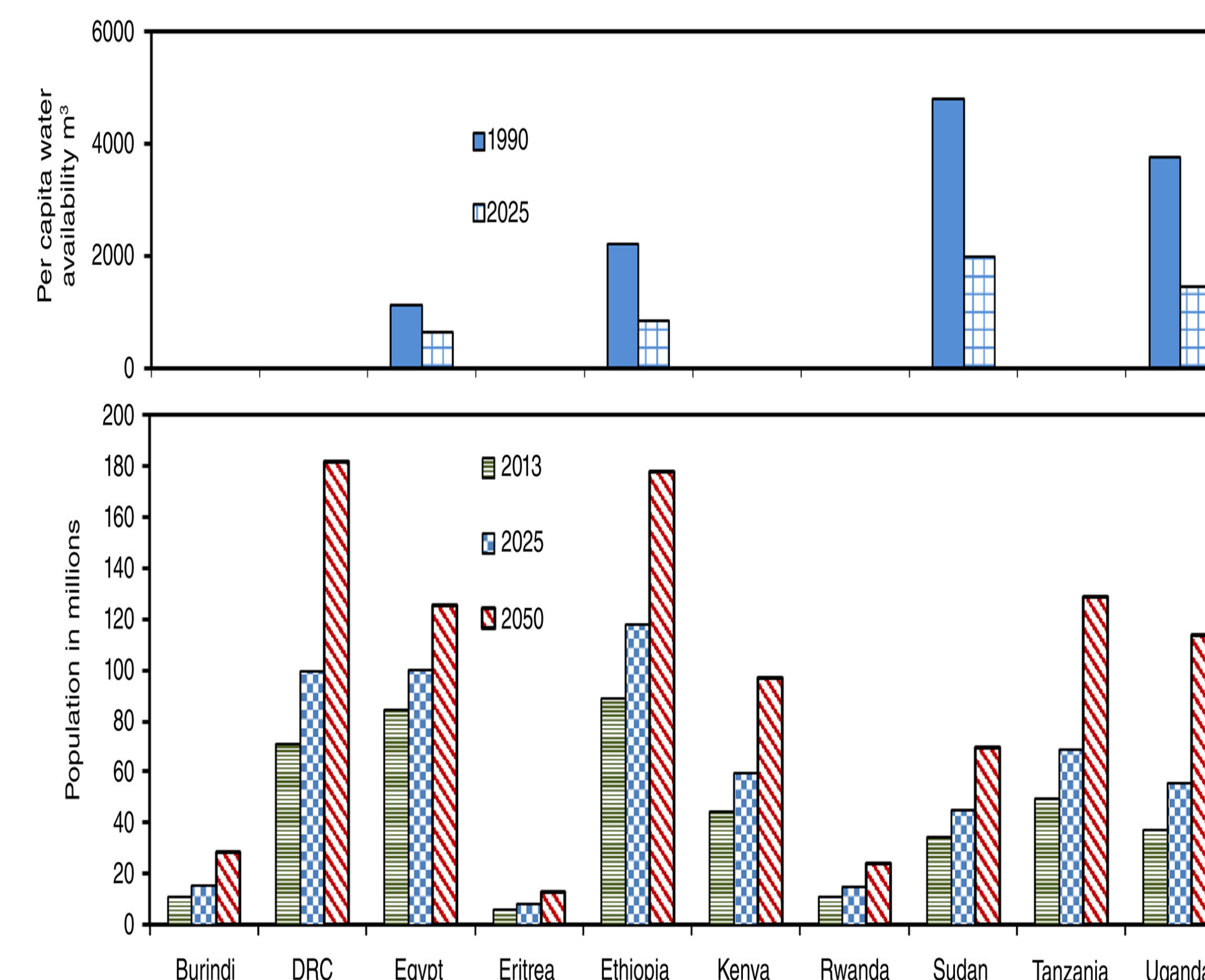
The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam:

In 2011 Ethiopia Announced the construction of The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).

- ❖ Ethiopia sees GERD as holding the key to its economic aspiration. 6,500 megawatts of power annually
- ❖ Egypt depends on the Nile for 90% of its water needs, and fears that GERD will reduce water flow
- ❖ Sudan hopes the dam can help it substantially expand agricultural production by better regulating annual floods



Future Implication



Discussion

The Nile Basin is passing through critical and uncertain times. The previous order imposed by Egypt is systemically being challenged by new realities and demands from assertive riparian's states. The old alliance of Egypt and Sudan, established under the 1959 Nile water agreement has engendered a new alliance of the upstream states. It remains to be seen how the assertiveness of the upper riparian of their right to an equitable and reasonable share of the Nile water will unfold and whether the NBI will indeed enter into force and effect. It also remains to be seen what effects this development would have on the task of the international panel of experts on the GERD. Regardless of the outcome, these developments have adequately indicated that Egypt and Sudan's water monopoly on the Nile basin is certainly coming to an end. The political turmoil that has enveloped Egypt in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution has undoubtedly created an opportunity for the Nile upper riparian to assert their rights to Nile water. The new alliance of the upstream and their unfolding has engendered more balanced power relations. The NBI has inevitably resulted in solidification of the major differences between the downstream and the upstream. Yet, the newly emerging power equilibrium within the Nile Basin could generate an opportunity for the two parties to compromise, and to realize that there is no alternative to cooperation. Such cooperation is needed desperately to pull 300 million people who live in or depend on the Nile Basin.

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