

# **Challenges in the Management of a Shared resource The Nile basin Experience**

Joseph Mulindwa , Email [mulindwajos@yahoo.com](mailto:mulindwajos@yahoo.com)  
Uganda Environmental Education Foundation  
P.O.Box 5658, Kampala Uganda

## **Introduction**

The Nile is one of the world's great assets. It is a shared resource by a number of African countries. The Ten Nile River riparian countries include Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda, Eritrea, DR Congo, Tanzania and Uganda. The river has nourished livelihoods, an array of ecosystems and a rich diversity of cultures. The basin encompasses an area of 3 million square kilometers and the countries of the Nile serve as a home to an estimated 300 million people.

Whereas the natural resources provide the basis of livelihood for the people of the Nile river, however there is still a big challenge to achieve sustainable socio-economic development through the equitable utilization of, and benefits from, the common Nile basin water resources.

## **Challenges**

The current problems in many ways are more of governance crisis. Countries are faced with the challenge of governance in water in order to ensure equitable, fair distribution and management of Nile resources. As a result, the people of the Nile are faced with a number of socio-economic and environmental problems. Very few can meet the basic necessities. Governance issues vary as in some countries there is weak water institutions and others display conflicting or overlapping making structures. This makes it impossible to know which structure is superior to the other. This has not only caused conflicts but also slow in decision making. When we take an example of Uganda, it has an interest in the utilization of water resources in her territory for socio-economic development. In spite of this, small abstractions for, say, small urban water supply schemes, have often been subjected to consent from riparian countries. Major water resources development projects for non-consumptive hydropower development have often raised international concern in the form of protests from Egypt and Sudan. There is already significant environmental, socio-economic impact on these countries of the Nile as the demand and utilization of resources has increased as countries strive to attain a reasonable level of development.

Good governance is not yet used as a tool in addressing absolute poverty and attracting investment and promoting equitable and efficient water resource services. The governments are moving away from the critical responsibilities of providing safe and clean water to its people. The donors are working with no or minimal incentives to provide water to the increasing population.

Conflicting laws and policies are another big challenge faced with the countries of the Nile. Efforts to harmonize these laws have in most cases not reached consensus as each party has its special interests in a particular law. The consequences of this have been environmental degradation and unsustainable utilization of resources. In addition to conflicting laws and policies, the agreement which was between Egypt and the colonial government to govern the Nile is out dated. It favors some few countries at the expense of the others.

## **Enforcement of criminal laws as regards water management**

The law enforcement officers to a large extent still limit their power to offences under the penal code act and are less aware of, other offences created under the environmental

legislation. Further to this point, there is still a lot of apathy in courts of law and environmental litigation is not given due attention. Access to environmental and water related information is still also a big challenge as in most countries the information available is not translated into local languages making it difficult for the local community to use. In addition to this point, information on environmental impact assessment is treated confidential

### **Lack of appropriate reporting procedures**

Project operations and developers in the basin rarely provide information relating to the status of their projects and there is no established mechanism of reporting environmental offenders. There is inadequate awareness and to some countries there is lack of environmental education and awareness. There is limited information dissemination. Integration of environmental education in the school curriculum especially at lower levels has not taken root

Water pollution is another big problem faced with the basin. Industrial pollution has added a new dimension to the threats of the Nile ecosystems. Most of these industries are concentrated along the Nile River and they discharge wastes directly into river Nile. Another threat to quality of Nile waters includes the eutroplication and the proliferation of invasive aquatic plants such as the water hyacinth (*eichloronia crassipes*). Community participation especially in decision making on how to govern and use the Nile resources is still a big challenge as governments rarely consult with the communities before making a decision which largely affects them

### **Recommendations**

Water supply and sanitation should fall under the general responsibility of governments through line ministries. In general, they should take responsibility of rural water development, urban and institutional water development, water resource management and inspection and support services. There is a need to harmonize water related laws in the region in order to avoid contradictions and conflicts.

Governments should have one line ministry responsible for water affairs under which there may be directorates with clear roles and responsibilities. This will ease decision making information flow and reporting systems. It will also help in avoiding contradictions and conflicts. There is need to review the colonial agreements in order to suit the current situation. The new agreement between the countries of the Nile should be participatory. There is a need to build capacity of all stake holders in water resource management at various levels. This will go along way in improving water resource management. Environmental Education should be introduced in both lower and upper levels. The countries of the Nile should also agree on the efficient ways of utilizing the resource with long term goal of sustainability. Environmental and water related information should be made accessible to all stakeholders. Some information should be translated in local languages for the benefit of the community.

Environmental problems in the riparian should be addressed in a holistic approach with the long term goal of reducing absolute poverty. Enforcement of the laws should be strengthened and environmental related offences like pollution should be treated like any other criminal offences. The existing structures like the Nile Basin Initiative should be strengthened and should address the socio-economic and environmental issues in the region in a holistic approach with the long term goal of bringing about sustainable development.

### **Conclusion**

Countries of the Nile should pursue a development agenda which takes cognizance of sustainability and mainstream environment protection in the implementation strategies. There

is also need to continuously review and refocus the development strategy to bring it in conformity with the overall goal of sustainable development being pursued by governments.