

## Ethio-Egypt: Beyond the Nile File

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**T**he bilateral relations between Ethiopia and Egypt should never be confined only to the Nile file for they have possibility to explore a huge potential for cooperation. Apart from their Nile bond, there is a deep-rooted religious, cultural and historical interconnection, this could be a sole reason for both countries to refrain from executing any project that could inflict any harm upon one another. In this regard, the two peoples interconnection would also play a significant role.

However, past experiences witnessed a number of ups and downs in building a common understanding on the use of Nile Water. Both countries failed to build confidence on one another. There was lack of confidence and trust and suspicion between the two countries. The problem was aggravated by the wrong path both international and national media were following in connection to the Nile Basin.

The aforementioned problems coupled with lack of political commitments of leadership on both sides exacerbated the misunderstanding among the two peoples. This led the Ethiopia people to judge Egyptians as if they stand against development in Ethiopia. In the same token, Egyptians viewed Ethiopians as if they have been attempting to block the entire Nile Water and leave Egyptians in draught.

However, both reflections are erroneous and resulted from lack of proper understanding of the reality, which remained one of the challenges for the two countries to reach consensus.

Despite challenges like irresponsible role of media, lack of political commitment and misapprehension towards one another hindering the thriving of good will and cooperation, the people to people relations have remained strong.

Aregash, 29, is an Ethiopian lady who has been living in Cairo since 2003. I talked to her on telephone when I was in Cairo as the schedule was a bit tight to meet her and have a face to face talk. She said, “Here in Cairo, I usually feel at home. I go to the church or any other place any time I want without any fear. Among other Ethiopians living in Egypt haven’t faced any problem even amid the cold relations between the two countries during the time of Moursi. The Egyptian people are so kind and considerate to Ethiopians. I have never felt that I live abroad; away from motherland for such a long period”.

As properly described by H.E. Late PM Meles Zenawi, the relation between Egypt and Ethiopia is like a very old marriage with no possibility of divorce. It has ups and downs but it is very solid. There is no possibility of divorce between Egypt and Ethiopia.

Hitherto, the central topic between Ethiopia and Egypt was the Nile. However, there are various areas that the two countries could cooperate apart from the Nile File. However, these areas have never been exploited so far in a way that could meaningfully help the people. One among many others is their religious background. Ambassador Salah Abdel Sadek, Chairman of State In-

formation Service of Egypt, agreed with this idea. He emphasized the fact that Islam, the religion of the majority of Egyptians was saved by Ethiopia. Hadn’t it been for the Ethiopian people, Islam may have not survive up to these days. On the other hand Christianity, the religion of the majority of Ethiopians, survived due to the people of Egypt. Both countries contributed for Islam and Christianity to exist up to this date, which really indicates how these two people have long been religiously interconnected. This is one reason for the two countries to make them restrain from inflicting any harm upon one other.

The Chairman told me in our previous meeting that public media in Egypt and Ethiopia should work hard to ease conflicts and strengthen mutual ties between the peoples of the two countries. The media should play its proper role in creating awareness among the two peoples that water is life to Egypt which is exactly the same thing electricity to the life of the Ethiopians.

President Abdul Fattah El-Sisi while briefing Nile Basin Senior Journalists in his office also said that nowadays there is a genuine discussion and talks between the two countries. “We have to build the confidence between two countries. Both countries have reiterated having

continuous genuine dialogues, which could help to strengthen the bilateral relations particularly in connection with the Nile Water”.

However, political analysts argue that the misunderstanding on the use of the Nile Water between the two countries hasn't come to an end. The people heard good news about the relations of the two countries at a certain time and bad news at another time. There are still ups and downs in ensuring genuine partnership, confidence and cooperation.

This is because of the fact that Ethiopians and Egyptians inherited wrong trends from the past. Previous Egyptian governments used to mislead the people that the entire Nile Water belongs to Egypt and the Sudan that no other country has the right to use the water. They propagated that no country has the right to develop any project on the Nile River including Ethiopia through which more than 85 per cent of the Nile waters passes.

By the same token, previous Ethiopian governments were propagating the idea that the Egyptians don't want to see the prosperity and development of Ethiopia. Moreover, they failed to consider the case diplomatically, rather they had been propagating that Egypt has been attempting to jeopardize efforts to develop

any project on the Nile River.

These two extremes not only hindered development in the region but also developed abhorrence among the people. Besides, relations between the two countries in other areas apart from the Nile Water remained handicapped in the past. There were even no official visits between the two countries almost for three decades.

Thirty years later, President Abdul Fattah El-Sisi visited Ethiopia. Of course, this is a new beginning, a new phase, a ray of hope for the peace loving peoples of Ethiopia and Egypt. The visit is also believed to help diversifying the areas of relations and integrating all sorts of potentials for mutual benefit.

Documents indicate that relations in the fields of health, education, trade and investment, though improving from time to time, need to be strengthened. It is time for both countries to explore all possible areas of cooperation for maximum mutual benefit.

For instance, Ethiopia's trade and investment relations with other countries exceed the relation it has with Egypt despite the great opportunity for the two countries to intertwine in trade and investment. Egypt's import from Ethiopia are

minimal compared to its imports from other countries.

According to available documents, the major import partners of Egypt include Germany, Italy, China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, the United States and India. Of its national import, agricultural products cover 24 per cent, which mainly incorporate wheat, maize and oil seeds. Besides, Egypt imports 40 per cent of its beef needs to bridge the gap between domestic production and consumption.

On the other hand, Ethiopia has the potential to supply Egypt's demand in this regard as it has a huge beef resource. It is simple to integrate this market. Egypt also imports coffee from other countries. It is possible to strongly integrate this market as well. Egypt and Ethiopia could be economically integrated in this regard.

Egypt produces more than 600,000 barrels of oil and exports more than 150,000 barrels per day. Ethiopia, on the other hand, imports a large amount of oil. This market can also be integrated for mutual benefit.

Egypt also imports oil seeds, sugar and cereal which Ethiopia produces in large amount so that Egypt could import them from Ethiopia. These are simple examples. There are lots

of economic areas in which the two countries could incorporate their markets for mutual benefit.

Egypt has well developed medical expertise and various technologies. Ethiopia could also buy and benefit from these technologies. The two countries could, therefore, cooperate in health and education. Egyptian Universities are internationally well known Universities. Ethiopian students can get train in Egypt. The visit of the Egyptian president Abdul Fattah El-Sisi will contribute much to the relations between the two countries and can play a significant role in strengthening all these bilateral relations apart from the Nile File.

using their water resources, the two countries will develop together if there is political commitment and goodwill. Egyptian officials emphasized that Egypt has no option for water; Nile is not a matter of option for Egypt. Of course, the entire life of Egyptians depends on the Nile Waters.

On the other hand, Ethiopians should get their daily bread. They have to use their natural resource including the Nile River to pull their country out of the quagmire of poverty. If there are other economic integrations, it is possible for Ethiopia to use the Nile Water only for

generating hydropower using its other water resources for its irrigation.

Ethiopia accepts that Egypt has the legitimate interests in the use of the Nile River. It believes that any controversy over a common resource can be settled through dialogue and equitable utilization; and restraining from causing a significant harm to one other.

It is stated that the country won't use the Grand Renaissance Dam for irrigation, rather it will use it only to generate electric power. In this regard, the two countries along with Sudan could work in unison for mutual development. As the Ethiopian mega hydropower project will provide electricity to Sudan and Egypt as well, they can easily expand their industries.

Late PM Melse Zenawi also said, "The utilization of the Nile Water is not a zero sum game. It doesn't mean if the upper riparian countries benefit, the Sudan and Egypt lose. It

doesn't mean that if Egypt and the Sudan benefit, the upper riparian countries lose. There is a win-win alternative and the only solution to the Nile is a win-win solution and it is not difficult to find a win-win solution."

Nowadays, the previous attitudes have been changing step by step. There is a betterment of mutual understanding. Besides, there is understanding of the impact of strengthening various areas of cooperation apart from the Nile file. Of course, it is now the right time for the two countries to assess various areas of cooperation beyond the Nile file that can help in integrating their economy. They should also work hard to strengthen the two peoples relations via consolidating the public diplomacy. Last but not least, the media in both countries should play crucial role in realizing this new phase of relation in which the two people observe a hope of ray and relations beyond the Nile File can be enhanced.