

BLUE PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST  
NILE BASIN LEARNING JOURNEY IN UGANDA

Co-Hosted By  
Strategic Foresight Group  
*And*  
Nile Basin Initiative (NBI)  
*With Support From*  
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**OUTCOME REPORT**

On August 8-10, 2016, members of the Blue Peace Middle East Community embarked on a learning journey to explore and understand cooperation in the Nile River Basin in East Africa. The delegation from the Middle East included senior policy makers, academic and technical experts and leading members of the Blue Peace Media Network.

Strategic Foresight Group organized the Learning Journey to Nile River Basin in coordination with the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), headquartered in Entebbe in Uganda. Following the

Learning Journey to Senegal River Basin, held in August 2015, this was a continuation of the 'exchange of experience' activities under the Blue Peace Initiative. This initiative is sponsored by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

The journey was conducted over a period of three days in Uganda during which the participants were able to appreciate the functioning of NBI and learn about its history and mandate. In addition, six other African River Basin representatives also participated in this learning journey which helped the Middle Eastern participants to get an overview of successful water cooperation across Africa. They included representatives of River Basin Organisations from Komati River, Gambia River, Congo River, Senegal River, Volta River, Orange-Senque Basin.



The Journey introduced participants to new experiences and gave insights regarding cooperation and efficient transboundary water management achieved by the riparian countries of the Nile River basin and the other African basins. In the course of the journey, a detailed discussion on updating the Water Cooperation Report by Strategic Foresight Group was also conducted.

The most significant feature which the participants discovered in the case of NBI and also in the case of the other African River Basins was their emphasis on cooperation and the importance of a strong political will. The participants also noted that the riparian members of the Nile River were developing countries that were trying to find a common solution to water scarcity and economic development through cooperation over the common water resource they all shared.



There was also an opportunity for participants from the Middle East to share their experiences on working on promoting water as a peace building mechanism and creating awareness about the importance of trans-boundary water cooperation in the region through various grassroots level activities. Most of the Blue Peace Media participants write regularly in the regional media about trans-boundary water issues. Some of them work with the local municipalities to conduct workshops on role of women in water management whereas some of them have conducted lectures based on the learning journey for the university students. They expressed their interest in the learning journeys as they find the knowledge is disseminated through such learning journeys.

### **NILE BASIN INITIATIVE**

The learning mission began with a presentation on the overview of Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), its structure and historical background by the Executive Director of the NBI, Dr. John Rao Nyaoro. The day was dedicated to understanding the socio-political background and the functioning of the NBI. A detailed historical background of the formation of NBI helped the participants better understand the context of cooperation.



Formally established in February in 1999, the NBI brings together all the riparian countries of the Nile River by providing them a platform for cooperation through two parallel cooperative tracks-the technical track, and the political track. The technical track focuses primarily on the following three areas:

- Provide a platform for cooperation and facilitates and promotes cooperation through stakeholders engagement
- Advance multi-country, multi-sector investment projects
- Support efficient, sustainable and optimal utilization of the Nile water resources by promoting equitable utilization and prevention of harm.

The political track (also known as the legal track) aims at the establishment of a permanent legal and institutional framework as a new NB legal regime cooperation and equitable utilization, protection, and management of the Nile Basin shared water resources.

NBI facilitates the building of working relationships between the riparian countries. Supporting, nurturing and fostering basin-wide cooperation to enhance and consolidate the ability of NBI to achieve the Objectives of the Nile River Basin Strategic Action Plan, water resources management programme and water resources development programme comprise the core functions of the NBI. Equitable utilization, no significant harm, notification, benefit sharing, win-win and subsidiarity are the guiding principles of the NBI. Currently the NBI is a transitional institutional mechanism awaiting the adoption of the Nile Basin Cooperation Framework Agreement (CFA), the comprehensive multilateral agreement. CFA negotiations started in 1997 and continued up to May 2009, when the Council of Ministers representatives of seven countries adopted it in Kinshasa, DRC. So far six countries have signed (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia and Burundi) and three countries (Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania) have ratified it. Upon disagreement on the article 14b on Water Security, Sudan and Egypt froze their participation in

the NBI activities in 2010. However, Sudan joined back in 2012 whereas Egypt still does not participate fully in all activities of the NBI.

The CFA states principles, rights, and obligations for cooperative management and development of the Nile Basin Water resources. The purpose of the CFA is to establish a framework to:

- Develop the Nile River Basin water resources in a cooperative manner
- Share substantial socioeconomic benefits
- Promote regional peace and security to achieve its shared vision.

To achieve the abovementioned objectives, the treaty recommends the establishment of a permanent technical mechanism – the Nile River Basin Commission (NRBC).

One of the positive outcomes of NBI is that it has been able to bring about sustainable socio-economic development in the Nile Basin through the equitable utilization of, and the benefit from, the common Nile Basin water and the related natural resources. It has increased communication, trust, involvement and cooperation among governments sharing the Nile, along with joint and transboundary investments in the basin. The NBI through its initiatives has enhanced basin-wide capabilities and capacities based on best practices, on trans-boundary issues in power development, trade, agriculture and natural resource management and development. The Nile Basin countries have also seen a convergence of legal, regulatory and policy frameworks on transboundary issues. Along with the multiple stakeholder participation, NBI underscores the importance of media as its strategic partner. There are several initiatives that are aimed at the capacity building of the media in the basin such as Nile Media awards, media training, and meetings with the editors and media houses.

Dr. Nyaoro also touched upon the Agreement on Declaration of Principles between the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia And The Republic of the Sudan on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project (GERDP) which was signed by the Heads of States on March 23, 2015. Later he emphasized the importance of cooperating and finding sustainable solutions together in order to fight the water scarcity in the basin. According to him, a balance can be struck once the cooperative mechanisms are in place. The problems can be foreseen and the solutions can be found before the problems go out of hand, eventually leading to a basin-wide development and peace.

## **EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES FROM OTHER AFRICAN BASINS**

On the second day of the Learning Journey, in addition to NBI, six African River Basin Organizations shared their experiences with the Middle Eastern participants. It was for the first time that the participants had a chance to interact with representatives of the seven major African River Basin Organizations at the same time. The representatives gave brief presentations on the history, functioning, achievements and challenges that their respective organizations face. The session was later followed by a detailed discussion on the Strategic Foresight Group's report on "Water Cooperation Quotient" where the participants gave their valuable suggestions and remarks which will prove instrumental in upgrading the quotient.

### **Volta Basin Authority (VBA):**

In order to institute measures for sustainable transboundary water resources management, the Ministers responsible for water resources of the riparian countries approved a draft Convention and Statutes of the Volta Basin Authority (VBA) on July 16, 2006 in Lomé, Togo. In Jan 2007, the heads of state signed a convention on Status of Volta River and establishment of VBA. The basin is shared by Burkina Faso, Ghana, Benin, Togo, Ivory Coast and Mali. The signing and ratification of the Convention for the establishment of the VBA marked a turning point in transboundary cooperation for the Volta River Basin, which commits the riparian countries to engage in sustainable development and enhance coordination and information sharing on the shared water resources. The VBA, which has a jurisdictional coverage of all surface and groundwater within the basin, including lakes, river, wetlands and aquifers, is tasked with the mandate to “promote permanent consultation tools among the basin’s stakeholders, promote the implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and the equitable distribution of benefits, evaluate planned infrastructure developments that impact the water resources of the basin, develop and implement joint projects and works and contribute to poverty reduction, sustainable development and socio-economic integration of the sub-region”. However, due to the financial constraints the functioning of VBA is not up to its optimum potential.

### **Organisation pour la Mise en Valeur du Fleuve Gambie (OMVG):**

Based in Western Africa, the Gambia basin is shared by Senegal, Gambia and the Republic of Guinea. The development activities to establish a joint commission between Senegal and the Gambia with the assistance from UNDP and FAO began in 1964. In accordance with the Senegal-Gambian Treaty signed in 1967, the 1<sup>st</sup> work programme was implemented in the basin with UNDP funding. Initially, the treaty was only between Senegal and Gambia and the OMVG was created in 1978. It was only in 1981 that the Republic of Guinea joined the commission. Guinea-Bissau is also a member of the organization though it does not share the Gambia Basin. However, it shares the Rivers Kayanga-Geba and Koliba-Corubal – which are also part of the scope of OMVG.

OMVG mandate is to exploit the common sources of the basins of Gambia, Kayanga-Geba and Koliba-Corubal rivers to achieve food self-sufficiency for the populations of the basins and to accelerate economic development of the region while maintaining the ecosystem balance in the sub-region and more particularly, in the basins. The OMVG has a strong legal foundation with the four conventions that have over the years defined the missions, competence, and organs of the OMVG. The Gambia River has also been granted the status of ‘international watercourse’. The convention on the legal status of common structures adopted on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1985 fixed the legal status of common structures and defined the rights and obligations of co-owner states. All the conventions were signed by the heads of the state demonstrating a strong political commitment. OMVG facilitates the management of three basins straddling four countries with three different languages. An important characteristic of OMVG is that it ensures the permanent dialogue between the grassroots level and decision makers for a better and sustainable development of the region.

### **Commission Internationale du Bassin Congo-Oubangui-Sangha (CICOS):**

The Congo basin covers an estimated area of 3.7 million km<sup>2</sup> and is shared by ten countries in Central Africa - Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia. To strengthen regional integration in the Congo basin and promote strong cooperation between States for river navigation, the experts of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) and those of the Democratic Republic of Congo, with technical and financial support of Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), developed and passed the Inland Navigation Code CEMAC / DRC in 1999, with States concerned. Later, they approved the proposal of the ECA to set up a basin management organization responsible for the implementation of that code, like the other basin management organizations such as the Rhine, the Mekong, and Niger. To make this happen, the Heads of States of the four riparian countries (Republic of Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo) signed on November 6, 1999 the Agreement Establishing a Uniform Fluvial Plan and creating the International Commission for the Congo-Oubangui-Sangha Basin (CICOS). Gabon and Angola joined the commission later.



CICOS is an intergovernmental organisation charged with the promotion of inland waterway navigation and the Integrated Management of Water Resources (IMWR) in the Congo basin. For the implementation of various technical projects, funding is acquired at two levels. The first level of funding comes from the system of autonomous funding through the Community Integration Tax, adopted by the heads of State of the Economic and Monetary Commission of Central African States (CEMAC) region. The second level of funding, the direct funding, comes from the DRC and Angola through their State Treasury. With the help of GIZ and African Union, CICOS is now using the Monitoring for Environment and Security in Africa (MESA) programme to deepen the mechanisms for information sharing with riparian Government institutions and industries. This has helped in providing real-time Earth Observation information on water depth to facilitate navigation and to enhance decision making in water allocation and climate risk assessment. Another important characteristic of CICOS is that as a regional organization it has a kind of veto power in deciding which water-related projects in the basins can get a green

light or not. The countries need an approval from CICOS before they implement any projects in the basin. The approval depends on the environmental and socio-economic viability of the projects. However, though progress towards achieving sustainable development of the Congo River resources has an upward graph, the limited harmonization of legal frameworks of the basin, population growth, deforestation and climate change pose obstacles in the progress.

#### **Komati Basin Water Authority (KOBWA):**

KOBWA is a bi-national entity formed in 1993 through the Treaty on the Development and Utilization of the Water Resources of the Komati River Basin which was signed in 1992 by Swaziland and South Africa. It paved the way for the Komati River Basin Development Project, a joint project between the two countries. The purpose of KOBWA is to implement Phase 1 of the Komati River Basin Development Project between South Africa and Swaziland. This phase of the project comprise the construction, operation and maintenance of the Driekoppies Dam on the Lomati River in South Africa and the Maguga Dam on the Komati River in Swaziland.

The main objective of the project is to:

- To optimize the utilization of the water resources from the system recognizing the rights of Mozambique
- To reduce the risk to prior existing farming by increasing the assurance of water supply
- To provide water for new developments with particular focus on the beneficiation of emerging PDI farmers, settlements and entrepreneurs

KOBWA through its various projects has managed to boost the confidence of the parties in its ability to manage the infrastructure and water resources. An organization with technical rather than political focus has helped the socio-economic development of the region.

#### **Organisation pour la Mise en Valeur du Fleuve Sénégal (OMVS):**

Riparian countries of the Senegal River emphasize the importance of finding common goals and working towards them since the inception of OMVS in the 1960s. The founding fathers of OMVS, the then heads of states of Senegal, Mali, Mauritania and Guinea had a common desire to exploit the transboundary Senegal River and its resources for the development of the people of the region. In the 1960s, right after the independence, the riparian countries of the Senegal River had political and ideological differences. At the same time, the recurring cycles of drought and floods were affecting the nascent economies and populations of the basin. In order to tackle this issue, the heads of states decided to keep aside their political differences and cooperate on the only common source they shared: the Senegal River. Consequently, a series of high-level ministerial meetings and conventions proved essential for the formation of OMVS. These conventions have played a major role as a legal and binding framework for cooperation and securing cooperative river basin governance in the long term.

OMVS is a unique case of transboundary water cooperation where the riparian countries jointly own the water infrastructure and have developed a cost-benefit sharing mechanism. The riparian countries have built a platform for open dialogue, information exchange and joint development regarding the Senegal River Basin. Drawing lessons from the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) model, the member countries have jointly developed comprehensive data collection systems and basin-wide models to study irrigation patterns,



flooding, and navigation and hydroelectricity potential. These models are used to develop future strategies for agricultural activities, development of the navigational potential of the river and other similar plans.

### **The Orange-Senqu River Commission (ORASECOM):**

ORASECOM was formalized by the Governments of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa through the signing of the 'Agreement for the Establishment of the Orange-Senqu Commission' on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2000 in Windhoek, Namibia. ORASECOM reviewed its organizational structure to bring it in line with the Revised SADC Protocol on Shared Watercourses in early 2007. The organization works towards improving communications and public participation. Through the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) the demonstration projects i.e. environmental flows requirement assessment for the lower part of the Basin (downstream of Noordoewer/Vioolsdrift, Fish River in Namibia, and the river mouth), irrigation efficiency demonstration in some of the farms belonging to the Joint Irrigation Authority between Namibia and South Africa have been implemented. It also addresses land degradation issues and tries to find ways to provide alternative livelihood for affected communities in Lesotho and Botswana.

At the end of the second day of the learning journey, a detailed discussion on updating the Water Cooperation Quotient was conducted. The participants gave their valuable remarks which will contribute to sharpening the Quotient which suggests that any two countries that are actively engaged in water cooperation, do not go to war for any reason whatsoever. The representatives of the African basins unanimously agreed on the importance of having a clear mandate (both technical and political) and a joint secretariat for a successful cooperation on transboundary waters. The participants suggested that the honest dialogue between the riparian countries, solid financial backing and data sharing are also equally important in order to exploit the common water resources for the socio-economic development of the basins.

Additionally, the participants got the opportunity to go on a field trip which provided them with hands-on experience of the functioning of a hydropower generation built on the Victoria Nile.

### **FIELD VISIT**

As a part of the field visit the participants visited the Bujagali Hydropower Project built on the Victoria Nile in the town of Jinja, about 140 km east of Entebbe. It is a 250-megawatt power-generating facility sponsored by the Industrial Promotion Services (Kenya) Limited and SG Bujagali Holdings Ltd, an affiliate of Sithe Global Power, LLC (USA). The main purpose of the project is to provide electricity to Uganda which suffers from power deficit and in turn to promote the socio-economic development of local residents. Considering the regular power blackouts of up to 12-24 hours, the Ugandan economy suffers a great deal.



After the visit to the dam, the participants went on to see the source of the Nile River. It was an overwhelming experience for all the participants to be at the source of the world's longest river from where it travels through eleven countries before it finally drains into the Mediterranean.

### **LESSONS LEARNT**

- It is when riparian countries face problems such as prolonged drought, depletion of water resources and other factors that can produce competition between them, that institutionalised cooperation for the sustainable management of water resources is most required. The African River Basin Organisations came into existence in order to address the problems of natural disasters or acute underdevelopment which would potentially lead to conflict over resources. This is the situation in the Middle East today, where natural disasters such as drought and underdevelopment in some parts pose a challenge. It is precisely at this time that institutionalised cooperation is required.
- It is important for systemic cooperation to work to have a combination of commitment at the highest political level, a functioning secretariat working in collaborative and independent manner, and clear rules of the game acceptable to all riparian countries. This is the case with all African River Basins. In the case of Senegal, Gambia and Volta River Basins, heads of State have expressed commitment, in addition to ministerial engagement. In other cases there are regular ministerial meetings. In the case of the Middle East, sometimes political leaders have expressed interest in cooperation, but other elements such as personnel from all concerned countries and underpinned a legal regime are missing.
- It is necessary to have common decision making. In the case of Congo River Basin, all projects have to be approved by the Secretariat to ensure that they will cause no harm to environment and other riparian countries. The decisions of the Secretariat are acceptable to all national governments. In the case of all other African River Basins, the River Basin Organisations have in some cases even higher authority, as compared to the

Congo River Basin Authority. The main challenge for the Middle East is to agree to such common decision making by a regional organisation.

- It is important to focus on benefits of cooperation rather than on losses. Any cooperative arrangement implies give and take which would lead to some gains and some losses. A mind-set which concentrates on the gains rather than on losses in every country leads to collective benefits of the populations of all the countries.
- It is important to translate commitment to cooperation in concrete infrastructure projects. A river basin organisation may own or manage large infrastructure projects as in the case of Senegal or Gambia River Basin Organisation, or approve such project as in the case of the Congo River Basin Organisation, or coordinate in the case of Nile and other African River Basins. It is important that cooperation is not limited to training, capacity building and institutional management. It is absolutely essential to have cooperation in water infrastructure projects such as navigation, hydro-electricity and irrigation which can make a difference to the lives of millions of people.
- It is essential to focus on collaborative management of shared water resources rather than allocation. In the case of the Nile River basin, the allocation of water is not fully settled, yet a number of projects have been launched by two or more member countries on a collaborative basis. Serious efforts are being made in phases to find an amicable solution even to a mega project such as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance dam which has implications for Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt. The experience of the African River Basins emphasises that expressions of interest in trans-boundary cooperation must translate into real projects at a reasonably fast pace. The implications of this message for the Middle East are obvious where discussions in the Joint Technical Committees, which meet rather infrequently, are limited to data exchange and training and do not tend to lead to collaborative infrastructure projects of significant size.
- It is crucial for each river basin to have a forum or mechanism for dialogue between state parties. The Nile Basin Initiative has a long history of disagreements which have been gradually narrowed down to the minimum and now have the prospect of the countries reaching an amicable agreement in the near future. This has been possible because the NBI is available as a forum where the state parties can meet, irrespective of the extent to which they may agree with each other. In the case of the Middle East, currently the Blue Peace Community brings together various stakeholders including individuals associated with the institutions of state. However, this is not an official forum of the governments in the region. It is important for the Middle East to take the next step to progress from the Blue Peace Community to a Cooperation Council of state parties to address the issues related to water and environment in the region.



## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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