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The Role of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) in Nation Building

Maryam Mohammed Jungudo

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies

Federal University of Kashere

Gombe State

maryamjungudo@gmail.com

Abstract

Nation-building is a crucial project that requires the services of many actors to achieve. It embodies such elements as national integration, poverty reduction through employment generation, robust economic development through industrialisation, as well as infrastructural revolution through good governance. The actors involved in it have different and very important roles to play. Fortunately, over the years in the Nile River Basin, the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) an intergovernmental partnership of Nile Basin countries, aims to ensure that Nile Basin countries work together to unlock the huge potential in order to bring a vast range of benefits to Nile Basin citizens including increased hydropower, food production, improved management of watersheds and better access to water for domestic use, among others. Against this backdrop, the paper asked: what roles did the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) played in the overall project of nation-building in the Nile River Basin? Using Ethiopia as a case of study, this paper discovered that the NBI programs have contributed immensely towards nation building, which generated a swathe of shared benefits, transforming lives in Ethiopia.

Keywords: Nation building, Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), Ethiopia, Nile River.

Introduction

Protection and optimal use of natural resources have in recent years moved so rapidly into the mainstream of international affairs. Of all the resources man depends on, only air is more directly vital to sustaining human life than water. Water is however, a precious resource without substitute. Without water, life will cease to exist. Nearly half of the Earth's land surface is occupied by Transboundary Lake and river basins. Many of these river basins are simultaneously perceived as important engines of regional economic development, crucial bases of livelihood resources and as critical sites of biodiversity conservation. Starting from the era of ancient civilisation, the Egyptians have made most use of the water of the Nile. Herodotus described this reality when he claimed "Egypt as a gift of Nile".

The Nile is an iconic river of global significance. It is a symbol of the human capacity to harness water for the development and growth of civilisations, but also of the fragility of our existence and unremitting dependence on water's life-giving properties. The Nile is also a complex river system in hydrological, environmental and climatic terms. It crosses the borders of eleven different countries namely; Burundi, DR Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, The Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda with very different social, cultural and economic realities. Sharing water resources between so many countries (and their growing populations and their demands) is a challenge in itself, but the geopolitical and hydro political realities in the Basin turn it even more complex.

To this end, the Nile Basin countries came together in 1999 to establish the unprecedented Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), to jointly overcome the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities to maximise benefits. This paper looks at how NBI programs contributed immensely towards nation building, which generated a swathe of shared benefits, transforming lives in Ethiopia.

Definition Of Concept: Nation-building

To understand the idea of nation-building, exploring the meaning of a nation becomes important. Early definitions of nation conceived it as a group or race of people who shared history, traditions, and culture, sometimes religion, and usually language (Carolyn, 2005). In this regard,

the people of a nation generally shared a common national identity. Part of nation-building therefore becomes building of a common identity. Accordingly, distinction can be drawn between ethnic nation based in race or ethnicity and civic nation based in common identity and loyalty to a set of political ideas and institutions as well as the linkage of citizenship to nationality (Carolyn, 2005). However, the contemporary understanding and usage of the term nation is fast corroding the old order and is now synonymous with the state only that a state is more properly the governmental apparatus by which a nation governs itself.

Having operationalised the concept of nation, it is therefore imperative to understand the meaning of nation-building. It was Carolyn, Stephenson who once noted that:

Nation-building is a normative concept that means different things to different people. The latest conceptualisation is essentially that nation-building programs are those in which dysfunctional or unstable or "failed states" or economies are given assistance in the development of governmental infrastructure, civil society, dispute resolution mechanisms, as well as economic assistance, in order to increase stability (Carolyn, 2005).

The implication of the foregoing is that, nation-building generally assumes that someone is doing the building intentionally and consciously. The building must be planned and properly defined if the structure were to reflect the choice of the builders.

Similarly, the concept of nation-building has been seen as the use of armed forces in the aftermath of a conflict to underpin an ending transition to democracy (Robbins, 2003 cited in Carolyn, 2005). Accordingly, Alesina and Reich (2013) conceive nation-building as a process which leads to the formation of countries in which citizens feel a sufficient amount of commonality of interests, goals and preferences so that they do not wish to separate from each other (Alesina and Reich, 2012 cited in Jonah and Ugwueze (2014:37). Jonah and Ugwueze (2014:37) in the context of their paper, they defined nation-building as a process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the state power which aims at the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run. Nation-building refers to the process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state (n.d). This process aims at the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run. Nation building can involve the use of propaganda or major infrastructure development to foster social

harmony and economic growth. It is also the development of behaviors, values, language, institutions, and physical structures that elucidate history and culture, concretise and protect the present, and insure the future identity and independence of a nation. For the purpose of this paper the following definition of nation-building is provided: Nation-building is the intervention in the affairs of a nation state for the purpose of cooperation. Nation building also includes efforts to promote institutions, which will provide for economic wellbeing and social equity

The Nile Basin Initiative (NBI)

The Nile Basin Initiative is a regional intergovernmental partnership comprising of 10-member states, namely Burundi, DR Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, The Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. Eritrea participates in this partnership as an observer. It was established in 1999 as a transitional institution to promote cooperative management and development of the Nile Basin shared water resources. (Nile Basin Initiative 2011, cited by Salman, 2011). The aim was to bring about socio-economic development, and to promote peace and security by minimising water resource based conflicts. This would be achieved by being the basis for Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) negotiations, which were finalised in 2010. The final aim is the establishment of a permanent institution, The Nile Basin Commission (NBI, 2011).

Enabling Environment

The Nile Council of Ministers, which comprises of ministers in charge of water affairs from each of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) member states, is the highest decision and policy-making body. The institution depends mainly on resources contributed by member states and donations and grants from bilateral engagements with different donors. However the failure by members to pay their contributions and accumulation of country contribution arrears has hindered the operations of the institution and coupled with the challenge of donors cutting their donations, which have been facilitating some of the activities.

Nile Basin Initiative has two complementary programs, namely the Shared Vision Progress and the Subsidiary Action Programs (NBI, 2014, cited by Cascao & Nicol, 2016). The first aims at creating an enabling environment for cooperation and development in the Nile basin through a number of basin wide activities, which include the negotiations for the

Cooperative Framework Agreement. This agreement will give legal mandate to a permanent institution that will replace the Nile Basin Initiative.

The Subsidiary Action Programs aim at translating the shared vision into action, these comprise sub-basin arrangements which include the Eastern Nile Subsidiary Action program (ENSAP) with Egypt, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan as members and the Nile Equatorial Lakes subsidiary Action Program (NELSAP) which includes Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda from the upper riparian states and Egypt and Sudan as down streamers (NBI, 2014, cited by Cascao & Nicol, 2016).

The Nile Basin Initiative has helped to create confidence and trust among the ten member countries to engage in cooperative trans-boundary programs and projects by working as an effective coordination platform for all the initiatives along Nile River. This has been achieved by encouraging Member States to deepen and expand the culture of joint deliberation to amicably solve any differences that occur in the course of developing and managing the shared Nile Basin water resources for socio-economic development and the peaceful co-existence of the Nile Basin States. These efforts have resulted into projects like Uganda – Democratic Republic of Congo power transmission line and Nile Equatorial Lakes (NEL) water resource development project.

Table 1: Structure of the Nile Basin Initiative Strategic Action Program

<i>Shared Vision Programmes (SVPs)</i>	Applied training Socioeconomic development and benefit sharing Confidence building and stakeholder involvement Trans-boundary environmental action Water resources planning and management Regional power trade Efficient water use for agriculture Coordination of shared vision projects
<i>Subsidiary Action Programmes (SAPs)</i>	<i>Eastern Nile Subsidiary Action Programme (ENSAP)</i> Eastern Nile planning model Flood preparedness and early warning Water management Irrigation and drainage Ethiopia-Sudan transmission interconnection Eastern Nile power trade programme study Baro-Akobo-Sobat multi-purpose development Joint multi-purpose programme
	<i>Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Action Programmm(N</i>

ELCAP)

Kagera Transboundary Integrated Water Resources Management (TIWRM)

SioMalabaMalakisi TIWRM

Mara TIWRM

Lakes Edward and Albert Fisheries (LEAF) project

Regional trade and agricultural production

Regional power transmission line interconnection

Rusumo falls hydroelectric and multi-purpose development

A Number of Conflicts

There are disagreements, which still exist among the Nile Basin states. Some Nile Basin states are rejecting the colonial agreements of 1929 and 1959 that gave absolute powers over the use of the Nile to Egypt and Sudan. In 1929 the Nile water agreement was signed between Britain acting on behalf of its colonial East Africa territory and Egypt. The agreement gave Egypt powers to veto any development on the Nile River. It also gave Sudan and Egypt 12 and 66 percent respectively over the general management and usage of the Nile waters (Di Nunzio, 2013). The 1959 agreement was signed between Egypt and Sudan. It reaffirmed the 1929 agreement, but gave away 18 billion cubic meters of water to Sudan, while Egypt retained 55 billion cubic meters of water annually thus leaving the upper Nile countries with nothing since it was assumed that they will always depend on rain-fed agriculture (Di Nunzio, 2013). Therefore the other eight Nile Basin Initiative member countries are now opposing these agreements. They want the unfair status quo to be reversed while Sudan and Egypt still want the new agreement to give them the right to consent to the use of the Nile waters by the other countries in the Nile Basin.

This has created a disagreement between the upstream and downstream (Paisley & Henshaw, 2013:11-12). Nile states over what should be included in the Nile River Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement, which was formulated in 2010, Egypt and Sudan has halted their participation in the Nile Basin Initiative activities for the last five years.

Aims for Permanent Institution

Article 15 of the Cooperative Framework Agreement creates a permanent institution called the Nile Basin Commission (Cascao, 2012:242). It will be a supranational entity with basin-wide authority and mandate to clear and approve national water resources investment plans and programs that sovereign member States will want to undertake along river Nile. Therefore it will act as a forum for cooperation and as a clearing entity for all the planned measures to benefit all member states. It will also serve to promote and facilitate the implementation of the Cooperation Framework Agreement and to facilitate cooperation among the Nile Basin States in the conservation, management and development of the Nile River Basin and its waters. This agreement will only bind countries that have signed and ratified it.

The most important article in the Cooperative Framework agreement is Article 4, which highlights the importance of introducing the principle of equitable and reasonable utilisation in the Nile basin, in order to destroy the unfair status quo which is based on the 1929 and 1959 agreements, Article 5 also obliges member states not to cause significant harm. Article 14 is also a source of contention (Cascao, 2012:243). It deals with the new concept of water security, which also poses a conflict over maintaining the status quo and reversing it. The article states that the activities of a member state should not significantly affect the water security of other Nile Basin states. Sudan and Egypt want the article say that activities of a member state should not adversely affect the water security and current uses and rights of any other Nile Basin State.

The Cooperation Framework Agreement is in line with other international environmental law instruments like the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (The Stockholm Declaration) adopted on 16 June 1972 by 113 countries, which recognises the right to a healthy environment Cascao, 2012:243). Principle 21 of this declaration provides that States have in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other states or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. It acknowledges that the goal of reducing human impact on the environment requires extensive fair international cooperation as many of the problems affecting the environment are international in nature.

Nile River Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) was opened for signing in 2010 and will enter into force 60 days after six countries have ratified or acceded to the document and deposited with the African Union (Cascao, 2012:244). Currently it has been signed by six countries namely Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Burundi which are all upstream states, no downstream state has signed. It has also been ratified by three countries, which include Ethiopia, Rwanda and Tanzania which ratified it on March 26, 2015.

If Egypt and Sudan sign the Cooperative Framework Agreement, it will enhance cooperation by strengthening existing arrangements and initiatives under Nile Basin Initiative. If they withdraw from Nile Basin activities and insist on rejecting the new agreement, the sub-basin arrangements like the Eastern Nile Subsidiary Action program (ENSAP) will be affected negatively.

The Roles of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) in Nation Building: A Case of Ethiopia

Ethiopia is the source of the Blue Nile (Abbay), which forms by far the largest tributary of the River Nile. Flowing from Ethiopia's Lake Tana the Blue Nile joins the White Nile at Khartoum in Sudan where it contributes about 85 percent of the water that makes up the main Nile. Since Biblical times, the life of the country has been attached to the Nile culturally, politically, and economically. Of the estimated land area of 1,144, 035 km², some 32 percent lies in the Nile Basin, and about 40 percent of the population lives there. Ethiopia has been part of the Nile cooperation since 1999 when the country became a member of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI). The country signed the Cooperative Framework Agreement on 14th May, 2010 and ratified it on 13th June, 2013.

Perhaps, the distance travelled in the NBI's existence is almost as long as the river itself – in terms of the change in cooperation that has emerged. This achievement cannot and should not be underestimated. The two Subsidiary Action Programs have promoted and supported countries nation building. However, the points below showcase Nile Basin Initiative's role towards Ethiopia's nation building; the benefits both achieved and in the pipeline, covering a range of energy, food and water needs, Ethiopia-Sudan Transmission Interconnection benefiting 1.4 million people.

1. Access to reliable and affordable electricity

Fully commissioned at the end of 2013, the Ethiopia Sudan Interconnect or (194 km transmission interconnection between Bahr Dar and Gondar in Ethiopia; and 321 km connecting Gonder-Shehedi-Metema in Ethiopia with Gedaref in Sudan) with a capacity of 100MW has brought a number of benefits to Ethiopia (NBI 2016:28). Nearly 1.4 million households (in both Ethiopia and Sudan) are able to access affordable and reliable electricity. Capacity to generate revenue from exporting power was also raised, to the extent that the export of surplus power has already boosted the country's foreign exchange earnings by USD 8.8 million annually. The predominantly hydro-system in Ethiopia has also reaped benefits by being part of a larger power system with Sudan, the significant thermal generation of which provides security of supply in periods of low hydropower production.

Other key benefits are the ability to better integrate reserve capacities, and in the process improve reliability of supply on the interconnected system and save on capital and operating costs (NBI 2016:28). In addition, more reliable and secure supplies have secondary benefits through lighting of schools and homes, better access to social services, and greater opportunities for business development. Small- and medium-sized industries in particular such as flour mills, rural water supply installations, tanneries, and coffee processing plants are then better able to create employment and contribute to poverty alleviation.

Furthermore, Ethiopia participated in the Eastern Nile Joint Multi-Purpose (JMP) Study, which identified the Abbay/Blue Nile sub basin as most suitable for cooperation among the three countries (Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan) in terms of large-scale transformational multipurpose water infrastructure development from which each country could derive benefits (a classic 'win-win' outcome). The Study produced two working papers, Paper 1 on 'Environmental and Social Perspectives on Blue Nile Multipurpose Development' and Paper 2 on 'Strategic Options Assessment for Blue Nile Multipurpose Development' (NBI 2016:28).

The Eastern Nile Regional Transmission Line:

Ethiopia-Sudan (Rabak)-Egypt (Nage Hamadi) will enable the country to generate over USD 600 million per year from electricity exports. A feasibility study has been completed for the Ethiopia-Sudan 1,200 MW or 9,200 MWh/yr and Ethiopia-Egypt 2,000 MW or 7,700 MWh/yr interconnections.

2. Food security

In terms of food security a total of 56,700 farmers has benefited from 20,000 ha of irrigation under the on-going construction of Ethiopia Irrigation and Drainage project. Another 92,000 people will benefit from the 7,500 ha Dinger Bereha irrigation scheme under the Eastern Nile Irrigation and Drainage Projects. More than 2,800 households benefitted from 14 newly-developed small scale irrigation schemes under the Tana-Beles Integrated Water Resources Development Project in the upper Blue Nile. (NBI 2016:29).

Improvements in soil and water conservation, agricultural practices, and access to extension services have led to increases in land productivity in different parts of the country. The project established 35 farmer training centers with about 700 farmers trained in improved cereal cropping, fruit tree cultivation as well as vegetable gardening and marketing. The project also established 13 animal health posts, supplied 735 modern beehives as well as 163 pieces of bee-keeping equipment. With the end of free animal grazing, fodder and livestock productivity also improved significantly.

In addition, small scale farmers and pastoralists in the Baro-Akobo-Sobat sub basin have benefited from implementation of the Baro-Akobo-Sobat multipurpose water resources development study project, which will identify upstream key environmental and social issues in this relatively pristine area and prepare medium and short term projects.

3. Water Security and Environment Protection

The Tana-Beles Integrated Water Resources Development Project in the upper Blue Nile has carried out a number of physical and biological soil and water conservation measures on 46,276 ha of cultivated land using a combination of technologies. Reduction in rainwater run-off has led to increases in groundwater recharge, river/stream bed-flow rates, water flows over time and greater water volume in the system. New springs have emerged, leading to a noticeable rise in availability of water for domestic use and for irrigation. Land vegetation cover in the protected areas has also increased, and indigenous plant species regenerated (NBI 2016:29). In addition, 680 safe water points have been constructed, providing access to potable water for at least 75,000 people.

Furthermore, a total of 205,000 people in Chemoga and another 160,000 in Fincha are set to benefit from the 600,000 ha watershed

management projects prepared under Eastern Nile Watershed Management program – new round of investment projects (NBI 2016:29). The Eastern Nile Flood Preparedness and Early Warning-Phase 1 established the National Flood Forecasting Center and have completed flood risk mapping over 1,750 km². At least 50,000 people benefit directly and another 500,000 indirectly from these project interventions including people from 107 flood-prone communities.

Conclusion

The achievement of NBI's goals has not been without challenges. In 2010, Belay et al. (2010) pointed to the key challenges to NBI as:

the dominant role of the World Bank, the lack of sufficient staff, procedural and policy conflicts, lack of coordination and linkages with other regional institutions, and the lack of recognition as a river basin organisation. The political deadlock in the CFA negotiations clearly also undermines NBI's overall *raison d'être*, though these are explicitly recognised by NBI, and indeed have shaped its focus on technical projects.

As such, while the NBI agenda is widening, accordingly, NBI's actual sphere of influence has potentially narrowed: the NBI had become increasingly focused on hydropower, while upstream Nile Basin Countries are continuing to expand irrigated agriculture, drawing on Nile resources. For example, since the global food crisis in 2008, many of the upstream Nile Basin Countries became preferential countries for large investors in foreign land acquisitions, developing large-scale projects. These were unilateral initiatives, with little or no explicit links to the NBI. More concretely, agriculture and other issues are increasingly being captured by national level policies and mechanisms, which results in the actual sphere of influence becoming limited to hydropower. Finally, the construction of the GERD, a national project, is the most striking example of a rising unilateralism over regional coordination.

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