

The Nile Basin Initiative¹

Introduction

The Nile is one of the world's great assets. Throughout history, the river has nourished livelihoods, an array of ecosystems, and a rich diversity of cultures. Ten countries share the Nile: Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. From Lake Victoria to the Mediterranean Sea the length of the Nile is 5584 km (3470 mi). From its remotest headstream, the Ruvyironza River in Burundi, the river is 6671 km (4145 mi) long. The basin encompasses an area of 3 million square kilometers - one tenth of Africa's total land mass—and the countries of the Nile serve as home to an estimated 300 million people. Despite the basin's natural endowments, its people face considerable challenges. Today, the region characterized by poverty, instability, rapid population growth, and environmental degradation. Four of the Nile Basin states are among the world's 10 poorest countries. Yet the Nile holds significant opportunities for cooperative management and development. Such cooperation might also serve as a catalyst for greater regional integration, with benefits far exceeding those derived from the river itself.

Description of The Nile Basin Initiative:

Recognizing that cooperative development holds the greatest prospect of bringing mutual benefits to the region, the Nile riparians took an historic step in the establishment of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI). Formally launched in February 1999 by the Council of Ministers of Water Affairs of the Nile Basin States (sometimes referred to as Nile Council of Ministers), the initiative includes all Nile countries and provides an agreed basin wide framework to fight poverty and promote socioeconomic development in the region. The initiative is guided by a shared vision: *“to achieve sustainable socioeconomic development through the equitable utilization of, and benefit from, the common Nile Basin water resources.”*

Strategic Action Program. The Nile countries seek to realize their shared vision through the Strategic Action Program, comprising basinwide projects, as well as sub-basin joint investment projects. The basinwide Shared Vision Program (SVP), a broad-based program of collaborative action, exchange of experience, and capacity building, includes a set of seven projects. These projects have been endorsed by the Council of Ministers and are ready for implementation:

- Nile Transboundary Environmental Action.
- Nile Basin Regional Power Trade.
- Efficient Water Use for Agricultural Production.
- Water Resources Planning and Management.
- Confidence Building and Stakeholder Involvement.
- Applied Training.
- Socioeconomic Development and Benefit Sharing.
- Shared Vision Program Coordination.

Subsidiary Action Programs. At the same time, groups of countries—one in the Eastern Nile and the other in the Nile Equatorial Lakes region—have identified joint and mutually beneficial investment opportunities at the sub-basin level (subsidiary action programs). The objective of these subsidiary

¹ *By Hon. Martha Karua, Minister for Water Resources Management and Development of Kenya
Chair of the Nile Basin Council of Ministers*

action programs is to translate the shared vision into action, realizing transboundary development opportunities within the agreed basinwide framework.

The Eastern Nile Subsidiary Action Program (ENSAP), which includes the countries of Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan, seeks to initiate a regional, integrated, multipurpose program through a first set of investments. Within this regional context, the Eastern Nile riparians decided that the objective of the first ENSAP project, referred to as the Integrated Development of the Eastern Nile (IDEN) project, will be to initiate a regional, integrated, multipurpose development project that confirms tangible win-win gains and demonstrates joint action for the Eastern Nile countries. IDEN comprises the following seven subprojects: Eastern Nile Planning Model, Baroo-Akobo Multipurpose Water Resources Development, Flood Preparedness and Early Warning, Ethiopia-Sudan Transmission Interconnection, Eastern Nile Power Trade Investment, Irrigation and Drainage, and Watershed Management.

The countries of the Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Action Program (NELSAP)—Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda—seek to achieve joint action on the ground to promote poverty alleviation, economic growth, and the reversal of environmental degradation in the sub-basin. They have identified twelve multicountry projects, targeting investments in agricultural development, fisheries development, water resources management, water hyacinth control, and hydropower development and transmission interconnection.

Projects identified within the subsidiary action programs have moved into the preparation phase. During preparation, a few selected projects will be fast-tracked into the implementation phase to yield early benefits from cooperation.

Growing Partnerships. Initial partners supporting the Nile Basin Initiative include the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and the World Bank. Since the first meeting of the International Consortium for Cooperation on the Nile (ICCON), several other bilateral and multilateral partner donors have pledged support to finance implementation of the Shared Vision Program and the preparatory activities of the sub-basin-level investment projects. The Nile riparians are supporting the core functions of the Nile Secretariat.

ICCON. To raise broader donor support for the Nile Basin Initiative and its portfolio of cooperative projects, the World Bank agreed in 1997 to coordinate donor support for an action plan and convene a consultative group meeting. The first ICCON meeting was held June 26-28, 2001, in Geneva. ICCON is a unique forum conceived as a long-term partnership of the riparian states and the international community. An outcome of ICCON was the establishment of a financing mechanism—the Nile Basin Trust Fund (NBTF). The NBTF is a streamlined and cost-effective vehicle to administer donor support for the Nile Basin Initiative. The NBTF will support the Shared Vision Program, the preparation of the subsidiary action programs, and the overall facilitation and general support to program-related activities.

Replicability:

The Nile Basin Initiative has now reached a stage where the riparian states have embarked on the implementation phase of the programmes jointly agreed upon. In addition, the strategy includes the Nile Transboundary Environmental Action Programme which is unique. The arrangement comprises now of an institutional framework, an agreement on the sharing of the resources, a comprehensive development programme of the Nile resources to the benefit of all and a clear mechanisms on funding and partnership. This set an example to the other river basins around the world.

