

# Towards a Participatory Environment in the Nile Basin Strengthening the Role of Women

**Africa water for Peace: Nile for Peace Initiative**





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## Introduction

Within the framework of its interest in addressing the issue of water-related disputes in Africa in general and the currently escalating crisis triggered by the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in particular, Nile for Peace Initiative presents the following study "**Towards a Participatory Environment in the Nile Basin: Strengthening the Role of Women**". The study addresses the role of women and youth in building development in the Nile Valley Basin, as well as the role of women in peace-building, while focusing on their role in solving the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) crisis, and concludes with an overview of the future of women in Africa between opportunities and challenges.

The African continent is endowed with many riches and natural resources, topped by the large number of youths, who are reliable for development and construction plans. Women represent an important resource in all the countries of the Nile Basin; they constitute more than 52% of the population of the Nile Basin countries. African women have a long way to achieve their rights and stand up to the customs and traditions that oppress their rights, as well as honorable attempts to address the difficulties of cultural legacies and deteriorating political conditions.

In addition to the youth potential of the African continent, the proportion of young people in African countries exceeds 65%, which gives the continent a great demographic advantage and an

enormous capacity for change and development, especially in an open environment that believes in the rights of peoples to formulate policies and build their own future.

The history of the African continent is a long impressive one, filled with honorable examples of the pioneering role of women and youth in various issues. One of the most common issues that concern the peoples of the Nile Basin is the future of water in Africa and the future of water, particularly after the construction of the GERD. Water security has been, and continues to be, part of the national security of African peoples and of the vital issues on which the best interests of States are determined.

## First: The role of women and youth in building development in the Nile Basin

Development, with all its meaning, is a dynamic process, in which several axes interact, and within the framework of dialogue between women and youth thought leaders, we find that the issue needs to be a participatory process centered on a series of "talks" with wide groups of African society, including the diaspora. , in order to converge ideas and analyze perspectives on their aspirations for Africa and define the Africa they want to see. A special emphasis should be placed on young people, as they are the implementers of the same visions, along with women with great potential to advance development and in a cooperative environment that transcends conflicts in the Nile Basin





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It is necessary to emphasize the important role of women in the management and development of water resources, where the special relationship between women and water was mentioned in resolution 25 adopted at the 1980 United Nations World Conference relating to the United Nations Decade for Women, which recommends full support for women in water supply, planning, implementation and technology.<sup>1</sup>

This was reaffirmed in the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (IDWSSD) 1980-1990 (also known as the Water Decade), which was announced on November 10, 1980<sup>2</sup>. This was reinforced in 1992 when UNDP and the WASH of the World Bank adopted the Dublin-Rio Principles; Which calls for a comprehensive water management as a basic limited resource of social and economic value, emphasizing the need to manage water resources in a participatory manner and at the lowest appropriate level, with women playing a central role in water projects.<sup>3</sup>

**It is not possible to talk about development without addressing the role of youth**, because the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Plan 2030 and the African Union Plan 2063, which target young people significantly in the quest to eradicate poverty and create employment opportunities for

all youth. Because youth are able to change the world for the better and achieve global development if they have opportunities and potential, it is therefore essential that youth participate in global and regional dialogue platforms. Therefore, within the framework of the Nile for Peace Initiative, these studies aim to create a knowledge bet to promote the role of women and youth for a participatory environment in the Nile Basin.

The spread of development thought and the foundations and concepts of sustainable development among youth is urgently needed in the light of the developments in our current societies at the economic, political, social and environmental levels. The role of this segment is important in its ability to make constructive change and work towards achieving the development goals of society, which can only be achieved through effective participation and involvement in institutional work. However, the involvement of young people in building the right development foundations is complete only through the availability of support networks and empowerment mechanisms that will contribute to building the capacity of youth to play their leading role in building the nation of institutions. The global formulation of the 2030 plan

<sup>1</sup> Nile basin discourse Fact Sheet on Gender Mainstreaming in Nile Basin <https://bit.ly/3yVuLeJ>

<sup>2</sup> Who, International drinking water supply and sanitation decade (IDWSSD: 1981-1990): decade commencement report?

<sup>3</sup> ESKWA, Dublin Principles <https://archive.unescwa.org/dublin-principles>



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considers the role of youth in all goals and targets.

## Second: The role of women and youth in the development of the Nile Basin

In order to direct the GERD crisis towards cooperative scenarios, which are based on the principles of the equitable right to development for all concerned parties with the issue, and the participants in a single river that links their fate together, believing in the importance of water as a national security and a matter of fate for the country as “no water, no wealth, no welfare.” In light of the rule of principles of international law, shadowed by language, religion, ethnicity and shared history, the study **attempts in this section to shed light on some of the activities undertaken by youth and women to promote a participatory environment in the Nile Basin.**

### A. Nile Basin Women's Forum:

A number of female leaders have established the Nile Basin Women's Forum as the first women's forum in Africa to support the relations among the Nile Basin countries, strengthen the role of soft power and popular diplomacy in order to develop countries and overcome obstacles and crises, topped by the GERD crisis, and to strengthen the role of women in all sectors in order to emphasize the role and influence of soft power in changing the map of peoples. Launched

in early 2021, the Forum brings together a large number of women from five countries to date, namely Egypt, Sudan, southern Sudan, Chad and Uganda. The Forum works to form women pressure groups around the world from politicians, intellectuals, athletes and artists. The vision of this Women's Forum is reflected in a set of principles, the most important of which is that water means life, as well as the delivery of a message to the world by the equitable distribution of Nile water and the consensus of the peoples and countries of the Nile Basin on this legitimate and original right.

### B. Stockholm Institute for International Waters (SIWI) events

#### 1- Workshop for Women Leaders in Water Negotiations

As part of its interest in water diplomacy, the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) organized a workshop for women leaders in Kenya-Naivasha during the period from 20-23 January 2020. The workshop aims to support women's capacity-building in cross-border water negotiations and peace promotion in the Nile Basin.

#### 2- Hosting a network of women working in the transboundary water department

The Stockholm International Water Institute has been hosting a network of women involved in transboundary water management since 2017. The network aims to exchange experiences and strengthen the capacity of women engaged in





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water diplomacy in the Nile basin to support their participation in governance processes and cross-border cooperation, which in turn enhances cooperative insights into the resolution of international river crises in the Nile basin. 9 Nile Basin countries participated in the session, namely, Ethiopia, southern Sudan, Uganda, Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Egypt. Its activities focus on many areas; water governance and the impact of climate change on water resources and rain, as well as the danger of rumors and false news in the media in the field of transboundary waters and how to confront it by governments and reduce its negative effects on cooperation between countries as well as public opinion in the Nile Basin countries.

### 3- Women's Network in Water Diplomacy

The Stockholm Institute's Women in Water Diplomacy Network shares experiences and lessons learned on improving women's participation in high-level water diplomacy processes. Research shows that peace agreements signed by women lead to more sustainable peace, and that higher levels of gender equality are associated with a lower state of conflict.

It should be noted that the Women in Water Diplomacy Network in the Nile is a project of the Stockholm Institute's Global Shared Water Partnership, which works to support cross-border

water cooperation in conflict-prone river basins. As the Women's Network in Water Diplomacy in the Nile moves towards its fourth year, there is a strong desire to advance women in water diplomacy, as demonstrated by events organized through the Institute.<sup>4</sup>

In a recent report, the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) reviewed a policy summary on water diplomacy and women's empowerment. There are a range of challenges facing women in this area, especially women interested in reaching the level of senior positions in the field of water diplomacy; including the lack of sufficient scientific and political skills that need to be developed and acquired, in order to be able to better qualify as national and global water diplomats, in line with fifth goal on gender equality and sixth goal on clean water and sanitation in national water sectors.

### C. Nile Basin Trade Union Federation

The Federation works to support the future of cooperation between the workers of the Nile Basin countries and promotes the role of women and youth through their own committees. At its fourth meeting, the participants made several recommendations that would serve as the road map for a new period, including participation in efforts to preserve the waters of the Nile River as a tool for development. The aim was to develop

<sup>4</sup> SIWI, Women in water diplomacy Network in the Nile  
<https://www.siwi.org/latest/lessons-from-the-women-in-water-diplomacy-network-in-the-nile/>





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a training and education plan for trade unions and to follow up its implementation in order to create African union cadres, with a view to supporting their capacities in general and to addressing women's and young people's issues in particular.

As explained above, the most visible patterns of interaction led by both women and youth in order to create a participatory environment in the Nile Basin, we can find that this environment - the Nil Basin countries - in which women and youth interact, provides them with a range of opportunities and challenges, which we mention in the next focus of the study.

### **Third: The future of women and youth in Africa between opportunities and challenges**

After shedding some light on the efforts made by the women and youth components to provide a suitable environment for them and to participate in the thorny issues currently facing the Nile Valley region, despite this, there are more opportunities that can be exploited in order to enhance the participatory environment for women and youth in The Nile Basin, the highlights of which can be monitored in the next section;

**A. Opportunities available through regional bodies**, for example, come as the sixth aspiration of Agenda 2063<sup>5</sup>, for the African Union, on "Africa, whose

development is based on its people, drawing on the potential of African peoples, especially women and youth, and the welfare of children." This recognizes the importance of operating Africa's demographic dividend by investing in its youth.

**B. New technologies:** new technologies and Internet tools help citizens, including youth, understand and monitor the work of and participation in specialized entities, and this also enhances access to information and transparency. In addition to, interaction through social media is a link between the people of the same society who are united by the unity of cause and destiny.

**Because of the limited opportunities available to youth and women, especially in the African continent, due to traditional societies and the absence of security and political stability, and thus community equality between different groups, we find a number of challenges that continue to hinder the path of youth and girls in Africa forward:**

**A. Minimal investment in young people to play representative roles and rely on**

<sup>5</sup> AFRICAN UNION AGENDA 2063, A Shared Strategic Framework for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development, BACKGROUND NOTE, <https://bit.ly/3iQMuhU>





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**older age groups;** youth are rarely trained to debate, lecture and deliberate on current issues, and therefore in most cases they do not contribute sufficiently.

- B. **Lack of knowledge and awareness of the specific roles of youth;** particularly in those sectors of political decision-making, older generations in many traditional African societies are not interested in engaging youth in discussion and decision-making. Moreover, the spaces reserved for young women to participate are hampered by the patriarchal system within or outside the family.
- C. **Financial capacity and scarcity of available resources;** most youth do not have the resources to participate actively in a context of financial influence, so that it is difficult to mobilize votes and campaign without adequate financial support.
- D. **Political and security instability;** because of the proliferation of conflicts, hotbeds of terrorism and armed movements in a number of key countries, women and youth are often put at the mouth of the gun, either by pushing in the ranks of combat or by taking responsibility for an entire family because of the loss of their husbands in the midst of conflicts, hence the lack of opportunity for genuine community participation in important issues.
- E. **The absence of a culture of democracy;** many young people tend to abandon

running for elections and all forms of political and societal discrimination mainly because they do not trust the political system with sufficient transparency, which provides a fair environment for work and competition with the older political generations.

- F. **Double discrimination;** there is near-consensus that young women suffer double discrimination because of gender and age, while young men are marginalized due to their lack of experience and other factors. We see that young women face another set of gender-related constraints, in addition to deep-rooted violence against women in Africa.

## Recommendations

In the light of participatory environment in which our present world is living, it is important to strengthen the principles of community participation among individuals and communities of society in order to promote development and prosperity, especially in African societies, in order to benefit from the vast human resources that they enjoy. Based on those principles, the study presents a number of recommendations to all stakeholders to enhance the role of women and youth in a more participatory environment in the Nile Valley region.





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## A. Recommendations to the African Union and its bodies

1. To intensify the work of forming youth platforms within the African Union in order to study the recommendations made by African civil society organizations and other bodies working in this regard on the latest developments in the situation of youth in Africa.
2. To work with African Governments to develop a program to qualify African women at the national level for leadership positions.
3. The African Union must assume its responsibility to prevent any armed conflict in the Nile Basin countries over water, through the establishment of an African mechanism to resolve disputes on international rivers and establishing specialized entities for this regard.

## B. Recommendations made to the governments of the Nile Basin countries

1. In the midst of the escalating crisis of the GERD, we recommend the governments of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan to return to the negotiating table to agree on a legally-binding framework, instead of direct confrontation that will bring everyone into a dark tunnel, cooperate with each other to achieve peace, conserve water, and preserve the interests and rights of countries and peoples.
2. Efforts must be intensified to make the Nile the primary link of cooperation

between the countries of the region, rather than being a cause of conflict between them.

3. Support and employment of youth creations through a series of diverse, integrated and ongoing workshops with a strategic dimension, through which the role of youth in society is enhanced.
4. The establishment of special programs in which the youth are involved in the process of dialogue and decision-making and they are motivated to discuss the most important problems facing society, to find alternatives and then to propose appropriate solutions to these problems.
5. Providing a value system that supports youth's ideas and capabilities, with the involvement of the media in supporting and preserving these productive young minds, within the framework of a community environment that employs these innovations within families, schools, universities, scouting teams, and others.
6. Deepening the role of youth in achieving political and economic development through the establishment of educational systems a modern and conscious perspective on the importance of political participation and socialization in the process of building a political culture with positive content and to examine and find successful solutions to issues affecting society.

