

# Water Wars: Conflict and Cooperation Along the Nile

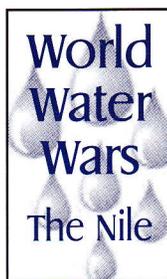
By Amaury Laporte

Access to water may become the principal cause of conflict in Africa during the next quarter century, with the United Nations now predicting that by 2025 the number of African countries suffering from water scarcity will almost double to 25 from 13.

The countries of the Nile river basin, which include 123 million people who depend upon it for survival, may be the flashpoint of this conflict. The world's longest river and its tributaries, including the Blue Nile and the White Nile, flow through no less than ten countries—Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda—

before reaching the Mediterranean.

Egypt, requiring irrigation for its crops, is particularly dependent on the Nile's waters. Egypt's history is interspersed with Nile-related tensions and clashes, the most grave of which involved either Sudan or Ethiopia. Both countries have the ability to restrict the flow of water to Egypt by building dams or initiating large irrigation projects. Two of Egypt's most famous statesmen have both emphasized the Nile's importance to their country. In 1979, Egyptian president Anwar Sadat declared that "the only matter that could take Egypt to war again is water," and in 1988, U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, predicted



that "the next war in our region will be over the waters of the Nile, not politics.

In 1959, Sudan and Egypt signed a treaty dividing the Nile's waters between them, with Egypt getting the lion's share, 87%, and Sudan the rest.

Other Nile basin countries were not included in the negotiations. But in 1989, a new Islamic regime in Sudan reneged on the deal. Since then, relations have continued to be tense, and in 1994 Cairo reportedly almost launched an air raid on Khartoum to destroy a dam that was being built there. But with Sudan struggling to suppress its southern rebels, it has been unable to mount a

*(continued on page 15)*

## International Aid Community

*(continued from page 8)*

Highlighting one of the primary roots of protection concerns, Gootnick described extreme poverty and "profound scarcity" in refugee camps as "the breeding ground for exploitation."

Meanwhile, Knudsen, citing the increased use of violence, rape, mutilations, and forced conscriptions of children as weapons of war in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire, said protection of refugees must become a primary focus of humanitarian assistance programs.

While protection is often considered the responsibility of UNHCR, Knudsen recognized the capacity of non-governmental organizations to provide protection to refugees and the displaced. Given the direct interaction between NGOs and refugee communities in the field and the fact that UNHCR lacks a mandate to assist internally displaced persons, Knudsen noted that there is "much more room for NGOs to be active in protection."

Though protection concerns are often

associated with West African refugee camps, Silva reminded the audience of ongoing protection needs for women and children in Afghanistan. According to a March report of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, such problems as the separation of families, limitations on women's freedom of movement, and forced and early marriages continue to contribute to the insecurity of women and children refugees, returnees, and IDPs.

Afghan refugees in Pakistan are also at risk to abuse, insecurity, and insufficient assistance. Noting the lack of access of Afghan refugees to safe motherhood programs in Pakistan, Silva cited a recent study by the Center for Disease Control in 12 Afghan refugee settlements which found that 41% of deaths among women of reproductive age were to do maternal causes, and 60% of their infants were either born dead or died after birth. In addition, returning Afghans often leave older children in Pakistan, where they frequently lack access to basic services.

While assistance is important, it must be accompanied with protection mechanisms. According to Silva, "adding a protection lens to assistance programs can help determine if vulnerable groups have access to services, or become victims of human rights abuses." Including women in the distribution of food aid, carefully planning the layout of camps, and consulting with women beneficiaries about the provision of aid represent just a few ways that protection can be incorporated into humanitarian programming.

Despite recent progress in the protection of refugees and IDPs, participants emphasized that more must be done to ensure the security and well-being of individuals affected by war and conflict. Assistance to refugees and displaced persons must systematically be accompanied by protection mechanisms. The alternative, warned Brown, is the all-too-familiar "well-fed dead." ■

Carrie Abner is a program associate with InterAction's Humanitarian Policy and Practice unit.

## World Vision Brings On Policy Adviser

Haidy Ear-Dupuy has joined World Vision International's advocacy team as policy adviser in macroeconomics where her role will be to focus on World Vision's Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers initiative and other economics issues. Before joining World Vision, Ear-Dupuy worked with Oxfam America as policy adviser in sustainable development, particularly the impact of international financial institutions' environmental and water resources policies on river basin communities.

## Helen Keller Names Two

Nancy Haselow has been promoted to director of onchocerciasis, or river blindness, programs of Helen Keller International, a division of Helen Keller Worldwide. Haselow currently serves as HKI country director for Cameroon, and will continue working in this capacity as she assumes leadership of HKI onchocerciasis prevention. She joined HKI in 1989, originally specializing in efforts to decrease vitamin A deficiency. She then served as HKI country director for Niger, Cambodia and the Philippines before becoming HKI-Cameroon country director in 2000.

Michelle Lang has been named director of Cambodia programs

of Helen Keller International, a division of Helen Keller Worldwide. Currently, HKI provides the Kingdom of Cambodia with technical assistance in programs combating vitamin A deficiency, anemia and the infectious disease trachoma. Prior to joining HKI, Lang worked in the Bangkok office of the World Health Organization from 1999 to 2000, and served Partners for Development in various Cambodian locations for the past two years. She has specialized in implementing programs in maternal and child health, reproductive health, nutrition and infectious diseases.

## InterAction Launches Diversity Initiative

Dawn Cooper has joined InterActions' Gender and Diversity Unit as the manager of the new Diversity Initiative. Cooper brings over 10 years' experience in the diversity field, predominantly in the corporate sector. In diversity positions with American Express, Amoco and more recently, Freddie Mac, Dawn has worked on developing strategic diversity plans, consulting with senior leaders on how to integrate diversity into business plans and objectives, and developing and facilitating diversity workshops. She has consulted for non-profits, government agencies, and universities, specializing in program development and program evaluation.

## Conflict and Cooperation Along the Nile

*(continued from page 12)*

threat to Egypt's continued dominance over the Nile.

The same was true for Ethiopia while it was racked by a protracted civil war. Although 85 percent of Egypt's water comes from Ethiopia, weakened by war, Ethiopia could do little to assert its rights. When the war against Eritrea ended in 2000, economic development became possible, and the construction of dams that had long been proposed was to begin. Egypt, which in 1970 threatened to go to war against Ethiopia over the planned construction of a dam, is now adopting a more conciliatory attitude.

Indeed, Egypt's historical domination over its Nile neighbors has been lessened in recent years. With Ethiopia on the road to recovery, and with Sudan

slowly making its way towards peace through a cease-fire between the Muslim government and the Christian rebels signed in 2002, the region is beginning to focus on economic development. Egypt, which used to foster instability in order to prevent its neighbors from challenging its control over the Nile, has realized that regional stability is in its interests. The necessity for cooperation is all the more pressing because the region's population continues to grow rapidly, whereas there is already little Nile water to spare.

Fortunately, even a little water can do a whole lot of good, as Oxfam, an InterAction member, has recently demonstrated in Ethiopia's Rift Valley. In partnership with the Selam Environmental Development Association, it launched a \$23,000 pilot irrigation scheme to bring

water to the small fields of 25 families. Supplied with six pumps, piping, seeds, tools and technical training, the participating families have been able to raise enough income to reimburse their debts, pay their taxes and fees, afford schooling for their children, and improve their diets. In fact, the project has now become self-funded, and, just as importantly, self-run.

The Nile's ten border states, despite their differences and continued tensions, formed the Nile Basin Initiative in 1993 in order to better manage their respective water rights over this great river. Progress, slow at first, is now being made more rapidly, and so it would seem that the Nile may once again bring peace and prosperity to its region. ■

Amaury Laporte is a contributing writer.