

Resolving the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Conflict through the African Union Nexus Approach

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Abstract

Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia have been negotiating for nearly a decade to reach an agreement on key technical and legal issues related to the impact of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Some of the major milestones in the negotiation process include: the formation of the International Panel of Experts (IPE) in 2012; Declaration of Principles in 2015; formation of a Joint Research Group in 2018; involvement of the United States and the World Bank to observe tripartite talks in 2019 and the request by Egypt to ask the United Nations Security Council to intervene in 2020. The outstanding issues to be resolved include drought mitigation, binding agreement, dam safety and dispute resolution. AU has been approached to intervene in the dispute. The involvement of AU provides an opportunity for the continental peace architectural framework. There are three ways through the GERD dispute can be resolved through the AU architectural framework. The first one is the Assembly of Heads of State and Government which is the AU's supreme policy and decision-making organ. It comprises all Member State- Heads of State and Governments and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) with regional groupings of African states. The second one is the AU Peace and Security Council (APSC). This is the pinnacle of the AU architecture framework because it is the standing decision-making organ of the AU for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts. It is a collective security and early warning arrangement intended to facilitate timely and efficient responses to conflict and crisis situations in Africa. It is mandated to promote harmonization and coordination of efforts between the regional mechanisms and the AU in the promotion of peace, security, and stability in Africa. The pillars of APSA include the Panel of the Wise (PoW) which is comprised of a five-person panel of "highly respected African personalities from various segments of society and support the APSC and the Chairperson of the AUC in the promotion and maintenance of peace, security and stability in Africa, particularly in the areas of preventive diplomacy and mediation. The third one is the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) which is the largest Regional Economic Communities (RECs) of the African Union. It has 19 member states which include Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan hence providing another opportunity through which the three states can negotiate through the AU framework. The purpose of this paper is to examine how the nexus approach which considers holistic approach to resolve disputes on a transboundary water resource can be applied in the GERD dispute through the AU framework. The paper will explain how the AU peace building frameworks anchored on the balance

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between continental leadership and regional responsibility for peace can resolve the GERD dispute. The paper will also explain how the AU frameworks can be used to promote integrated and sustainable management outcomes. Significant steps of dispute resolution mechanisms through the AU framework will be highlighted.

Keywords: GERD, AU, Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, Water conflict resolution, Nile Basin