

Distributional Conflict over the Blue Nile River Basin and its Implication for Institutional Change (The Case of Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt)

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Abstract

This study is concerned with the assessment of the distributional conflict over Blue Nile River basin and its implication to institutional change with particular emphasis to Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. The major objective of this study is to examine the property rights change and distributional conflict of the three major riparian countries (Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt) over the Blue Nile River. To this end, the study analyses the relation and interaction between the actors on Blue Nile River Basin over time through changed political contexts. This study used more of qualitative case study approach. Secondary data from World Bank, Ministry of Water Resources, media, and the study of national and regional documents were critically reviewed. Institutional analysis requires a framework for analysing how institutions change, affect behavior and coordinate human action for testing hypothesis and falsify propositions. IAD (Institutional Analysis and Development) Framework is used as an analytical tool to review the interaction among initial context, action arena and outcomes, each being further decomposed to guide the analysis, for Nile Basin Countries. There have been discussions between the key players of the game i.e. officials of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia in particular, aimed at exploring the possibilities of cooperation between the three countries on the waters of the Blue Nile. While Ethiopia advocated the principle of negotiation on water sharing, Egypt's position was for limiting negotiations to cooperation in exchanging information in hydrological studies. These positions, however, do not go far enough to address other simmering problems such as water shortage. Hence, this study accepts Libcap's (1998) distributional conflict theory which states "when the economies of players or actors grow, then actors try to share the common resources they have, and distributional conflicts arise as a result of it". Regarding the use of the waters of Blue Nile, future conflicts are possible among the three major riparian countries. We have to make sure that recent rules of property rights over use of Blue Nile River basin will be unquestionable to serve the interests of those with strong bargaining power. This ideological change also sheds light on the role of distributional inequality in property rights transformation over the use of the Blue Nile River Basin. So, it is suggested that Ethiopia should consider future conflict over the distribution of the Blue Nile River is highly possible. Hence any negotiations should (a) alleviate tension through the formulation of a specific set of strategies catering for the economic, environmental, socio-political, and technical aspects of the three countries within the watershed and (b) take into consider Ethiopia's future water demands and the shortages that would happen as its population size and the need for modernizing agriculture continues.

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