Water management for services and productive uses from a human rights approach: **impact of violations of Ethiopian water management policies on the service and production uses of neighboring countries**

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**Introduction**

Improper and irrational water management policies taken on the African continent threaten the productive capabilities of the continent’s countries (industrial, agricultural, and electrical), and also limit their ability to benefit from the services value of water. The fragility of water systems and their lack of resistance to drought waves has contributed over a long period to the erosion of 65% of water. Agricultural lands and food crops from 1950 until February 2024, and estimates indicate that in the future they may cause a threat to 2/3 of African agricultural lands by 2025. In Ethiopia, the negative effects of water management and its plans did not stop at the national interior, but rather by it being a participating country in several Basins and being as a country the main source of the Blue Nile, the repercussions and risks of its policies and methods of unilateral management of water resources have extended to neighboring countries. Effects and threats of Ethiopian dams on the productive and water uses of neighboring countries in a way that now threatens their existence and livelihood, whether its neighboring countries in the Nile Basin, such as Egypt and Sudan or other countries. Its partner neighbors are in Lake Turkana Basin and Juba-Shebelle Basin, such as Kenya and Somalia.

In this context, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights submits its report to the Special Rapporteur on the right to water and sanitation, to review the dangers of irrational Ethiopian water management and its impact on the service and productive uses of national and regional waters, and attempts to shed light on those impacts on countries such as Egypt, Sudan, and Kenya.

**First: impact of the Ethiopian administration’s violations of water on Egyptian service uses and production**

Ethiopia's fourth unilateral filling of the Renaissance Dam confirmed Egyptian fears of the repercussions and damage to Ethiopian water management policies, especially through the Renaissance Dam. The fourth filling of Renaissance Dam, which was completed in September 2023, caused a loss of 12 billion cubic meters of Egypt’s water share. However, without any commitment to legal, human rights, or international considerations, Ethiopia announced in January 2024 that it had taken measures to prepare for the fifth filing of the Dam, which necessitated sounding alarm about the risks. Unilateral water management and its repercussions on Egypt’s right to service and productive uses of water in light of its increasing dependence on the Nile River water by (97%), its water deficit increasing to 120 billion m3, and the Egyptian citizen per capita water share decreasing to reach (550) mm3 in 2021, and (400, 249) By (2025: 2050)[[1]](#footnote-1)

This quantity decreased with the decrease in groundwater by (33%) or at a rate of (2.14) billion cubic meters annually[[2]](#footnote-2). Regarding productive uses, the direct reduction in Egyptian water share severely threatens agricultural activities within Egypt, especially in light of its dependence on irrigation by (99.9%) and consumption of (81%) of water resources. In this context, the value of deficit in the agricultural sectors ranges between (4.2: 14.8) billion cubic mm of water[[3]](#footnote-3). Therefore, in a catastrophic manner, the Renaissance Dam threatens the agricultural sectors and their contributions estimated at approximately (15%) of the gross domestic product, (20%) of the total exports, and (30%) of total Egyptian workforce. Some reports also indicated that the loss of (5) billion cubic meters of water would fill (1) million feddans of the total estimated agricultural area out of (8.5) million feddans, and one billion cubic meters of water would achieve an economic return of one billion dollars per billion cubic meters. The fourth unilateral filling procedures caused in determining the area of rice at about 1.1 million acres, he warned of deepening the food gap to 75% and raising it from its currently estimated percentage of about 55% of Egypt’s total food needs. [[4]](#footnote-4)

**Second: impact of Ethiopian water management violations on Sudanese service and production uses**

The effects of irrational water management by Ethiopia of the water resources it shares with Sudan on the Sudanese reality are exacerbated, especially resulting from Renaissance Dam and the unilateral management of filling the dam and filling it for the fourth time in a row, as studies indicate that filling Renaissance Dam plan estimated at an average of (6) years causing reduction of about (3) billion cubic meters of water, equivalent to about (25%) of Sudan’s total water share[[5]](#footnote-5). Regarding productive uses, the effects of the dam on productive uses appear when referring to the dam’s impoundment of silt behind the dam lake, which threatens the future of the sector. Agriculture in Sudan, on which about 80% of the Sudanese people depend and generates 28% of the gross domestic product[[6]](#footnote-6). Given the repercussions of the fourth filling completed in September 2023, follow-up and monitoring of the Sudanese reality reveals that Renaissance dam’s filling operations caused the deprivation of agricultural lands around the Blue Nile in Sudan is estimated at about one million acres of silt deposition and soil washing annually by flood waters, in addition to its role in forcing Sudanese farmers in the future to dig irrigation canals, establish expensive irrigation networks, and adapt socially and economically to the new conditions.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**Third: impact of the Ethiopian administration’s violations of water on Kenyan service uses and production**

Ethiopian policies follow an irrational approach to its management of water and water tributaries on rivers, negatively affecting its neighboring partner countries in other basins. In the Lake Turkana basin, Ethiopia unilaterally implemented a series of Gibe dams under the pretext of developing and managing its water resources. On the Omo River, Ethiopia built the Giba 1, Giba 2, and Giba 3 dams, and is planning to build the Giba 4 and Giba 5 dams. Through time, these dams produce catastrophic repercussions and existential threats affecting the water uses and production of its neighboring country, Kenya, especially in light of the adoption of Lake Turkana, a tributary of the Omo River. In providing 90% of its water resources, the irrational Ethiopian unilateral management of that lake has threatened lives of half a million Kenyan residents. These effects resulting from the dams can be seen in the decrease in water levels in the lake by two meters after the amount of water flowing from the river into the lake decreased by 50%, in addition to the high percentage of water salinity, and the decline in the percentage of water to 1.7 km in Ferguson Bay, which is a vital area for fishing on which local community people residing on the shores of the lake depends, in addition to the shrinking area of livestock pastures and the high rate of soil dryness, which contributes to the spread of hunger in local communities.[[8]](#footnote-8)

**Fourth: impact of the Ethiopian administration’s violations of water on Somali service uses and production**

Somalia, like its counterparts from Ethiopia's partner countries in the river basins, has been affected by Ethiopia's unilateral and illegal water policies. The unilateral Ethiopian dams on Jubba and Shabelle rivers have caused water levels to drop by about 80% below their natural estimates, which threatens water needs for 1/3 of the Somali population in the south of the country[[9]](#footnote-9). The repercussions of Ethiopian dams in Somalia appear clear when looking at the Jinal Dawa Dam, as it did not carry out any coordination with the Somali side, which led to a water imbalance and a decrease in the percentage of water in the Jubba River from 5.8 to 4.8 billion meters/cube. Farmers in the Juba Valley were affected, also it caused the "Luk City" drought. The Ethiopian unilateral administration also prevented Somalia from being able to manage its water resources, such as its inability to build the "Bardhir Dam." [[10]](#footnote-10)

**Recommendations**

After monitoring and analyzing the irrational Ethiopian administrative policies for water resources, and the impact and repercussions of those policies on both productive and service uses of water inside Ethiopia and in neighboring countries, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights presents its recommendations as follows:

1. Maat recommends the Special Rapporteur on the right to water and sanitation provide technical support to the Ethiopian government, also urges it to activate water and development partnerships with its neighboring countries in a way that would agree on a settlement that does not harm the interests of any of its neighboring countries, and to increase investments in irrigated agriculture and infrastructure projects infrastructure.
2. Maat appeals to the Ethiopian government to return to its international and regional obligations related to managing water-shared resources abandon its unilateral policies, and adhere to the principles of achieving equitable, reasonable, and beneficial, and not cause harm to the neighboring countries as Egypt, Sudan, Kenya and Somalia.
3. Maat calls on the Ethiopian government to allow concerned authorities and experts to conduct real, practical, and evaluation studies on the impact of its dams, especially the Renaissance Dam, and their repercussions on all political, security, and economic levels in its neighboring countries, to achieve solidarity and joint water governance of emergencies.
4. Maat encourages the Ethiopian government to exchange information and data, and support transparency with neighboring countries, to enhance joint management of emergency situations, which may have been caused by some unilateral Ethiopian policies.

1. Asharq Al-Awsat, how much will Egypt be affected by the fourth filling of the “Ethiopian Dam”? accessed March 2024, <https://shorter.me/Drob8> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hala Al-Sayyid Hilali, Egyptian Water Security: A Study of Threats, Risks, and Coping Mechanisms: The Renaissance Dam as a Model, “Derasat Magazine,” Volume (20), Issue (2), April 2019, p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Agriculture Portal, Dr. Abbas Sharaqi writes: Renaissance Dam... Types of damage, accessed March 2024, <https://bit.ly/3H3q3PK> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Russia Today, amounting to billions of dollars... An Egyptian expert warns of major losses after Ethiopia begins the fourth filling of the Renaissance Dam, August 13, 2023, <https://shorter.me/Uxx0N> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The first filling of the Renaissance Dam, what it means and what it entails, accessed March 2024, <https://bit.ly/3qmH8xd>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hamdi Abdel Rahman Hassan, The Renaissance Dam Crisis: The Challenge of Water Hegemony and the Sudanese-Egyptian Dilemma, “Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,” Issue (39), Fall 2020, pp. 45-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://shorter.me/Uxx0N> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Egyptian Center for Thought and Strategic Studies, Regional Implications of the Ethiopian Dam Policy, op. cit., accessed March 2024, <https://ecss.com.eg/7091/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Egyptian Center for Strategic Thought and Studies, Regional Implications of the Ethiopian Dam Policy: The Case of Lake Turkana, accessed March 2024, <https://ecss.com.eg/7091/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Raseef, two rivers are about to dry up... Is Ethiopia using water as a political weapon against Somalia? Two rivers are about to dry up... Is Ethiopia using water as a political weapon against Somalia? accessed March 2024, <https://shorter.me/23-2U>

    [↑](#footnote-ref-10)