

# The Nile Cooperative Framework Agreement: Implications for Egypt, Sudan, and Japan's Strategic Interests in African Stability

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- The implementation of the Nile Cooperative Framework Agreement introduces new challenges for Egypt and Sudan by allowing upstream countries to undertake projects without notifying downstream states. This shift reconfigures control over Nile water resources and weakens the influence of Egypt and Sudan.
- Japan should prioritize water security in its development cooperation programs, particularly through the Tokyo International Conference on African Development. By supporting sustainable water management projects and capacity building, Japan can help mitigate water-related tensions and ensure long-term regional stability.

The Nile Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) is set to come into force in October 2024, following South Sudan's ratification as its sixth member, which introduces new dynamics to the Nile Basin. Egypt and Sudan have opposed the agreement, citing concerns over its impact on their water security. These developments are particularly relevant to Japan, given its vested interests in African development and regional stability, as they could impact its economic investments and foreign policy aid programs. This brief outlines the CFA's implications for Egypt and Sudan and provides recommendations for Japan's future diplomatic engagement and development assistance in the region.

## The Evolution of the Nile Cooperative Framework Agreement

The CFA emerged from the 1999 [Nile Basin Initiative](#) (NBI), which was initially formed by 10 Nile riparian states and later expanded to 11, following South Sudan's secession in 2011. The NBI aimed to foster cooperation based on mutual benefit and harm prevention, while also establishing a permanent framework to institutionalize these principles and ensure participation of all riparian states. Work on the CFA began shortly after the NBI's formation, and it was supported by the World Bank, UNDP, and other donors.

After over a decade of negotiations, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda signed the CFA on May 14, 2010, in Entebbe, Uganda, with Kenya and Burundi joining later. This

move faced opposition from Egypt and Sudan, as they sought to uphold the colonial-era water agreements of 1902 and 1929 as well as the 1959 bilateral accord, all of which granted them veto power over upstream water projects. They particularly opposed [Article 14\(b\)](#) of the CFA, which requires Nile Basin countries to avoid impacting the water security of other member states.

In response, Egypt and Sudan [proposed amending the article](#) to include "not to adversely affect the water security and current uses and rights of any other Nile Basin State." However, upstream and midstream countries rejected this specification, arguing that the inclusion of "current uses and rights" would reinforce the historical water rights established by the 1902 and 1959 agreements between Egypt and Sudan as well as longstanding resource allocation practices.

By 2023, 5 of the 11 Nile riparian states—Ethiopia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Burundi—had ratified the CFA, leaving it just one ratification away from entering into force. On July 8, 2024, South Sudan's parliament [unanimously ratified](#) the CFA. Sixty days after South Sudan deposits its ratification with the African Union (AU), the CFA will come into effect, leading to the establishment of the Nile Basin Commission, which will replace the NBI with a broader mandate, greater authority, and increased global recognition.

These developments hold significant importance for Japan, given its economic and diplomatic engagement with Africa through the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). Amidst rising competition with China,

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[Japan is seeking to strengthen its ties with the Global South](#) by promoting mutual growth. As Africa is set to become a major future market and hub of economic growth, stability across the continent—including in the Nile Basin—is essential to ensure long-term prosperity, which will [benefit Africa and the global economy, including Japan](#). However, tensions over water resources present a pertinent risk to regional development projects, infrastructure, and humanitarian efforts, potentially undermining these growth opportunities.

### The Nile Cooperative Framework Agreement's Impact on Egypt and Sudan

[Egypt relies on the Nile for 98% of its renewable water resources](#), a dependency that has persisted for millennia due to limited alternatives. The CFA [allows upstream countries to undertake Nile water projects without prior notification to downstream nations](#), potentially reducing Egypt's share of water and exacerbating existing shortages. Geopolitically, the CFA undermines Egypt's regional influence by overriding the earlier water agreements of 1902, 1929, and 1959, thereby weakening its longstanding control over Nile water resources.

The CFA also poses a major challenge to Sudan's hydropower development, particularly if existing water-sharing agreements are renegotiated. Hydropower has become a vital alternative for Sudan following the loss of oil revenues after South Sudan's secession in 2011. Both nations face instability from ongoing political and military conflicts, along with severe humanitarian crises. South Sudan's ratification of the CFA could further strain their relations, worsening an already fragile situation.

### Relevance for Japan and the International Community

**Regional Stability and Security:** The Nile is a lifeline for millions, and disruptions to existing water-sharing agreements or a lack of consensus on new ones could escalate tensions and potentially trigger conflict. Egypt recently joined the AU Peacekeeping Mission in Somalia and signed a [defense agreement with the Somali government](#), preparing to send troops and military aid to Mogadishu. This is significant considering Egypt's ongoing dispute with Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which Egypt fears will reduce its share of Nile waters. The [GERD reservoir will store](#) approximately 1.2 times the Blue Nile's average annual flow at the dam site, a fact that understandably raises concerns among both the people and governments of Egypt and Sudan. Despite its efforts, Egypt has been unable to prevent Ethiopia from unilaterally filling the dam, with the fifth filling in July

further escalating tensions with Egypt and Sudan. [Ethiopia views Egypt's military presence near its border with Somalia as a threat](#), and any further deterioration in relations could destabilize the already volatile East African region, exacerbating humanitarian conditions.

Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous country (with a population of nearly 118 million people) and a growing economic powerhouse, has recently emerged from a brutal civil war that remains unresolved. Meanwhile, Sudan is also embroiled in a violent civil war that is destabilizing the region. These conflicts are unfolding near the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, a crucial maritime shipping chokepoint connecting Asia, Africa and Europe. The region's fragility has been underscored by missile and drone attacks from the Houthis in Yemen, which have disrupted global shipping and driven up prices, resulting in broader economic impacts. Given Japan's strong interest in maintaining peace and stability in this sensitive region, through which a large portion of its energy supplies and trade passes, policymakers should be acutely aware of the risks, particularly in the Horn of Africa.

**Development Cooperation:** Japan has a long history of investing in African infrastructure, agriculture, and water projects. However, rising water insecurity and growing tensions between the Nile riparian states could undermine such development efforts and force Japan to recalibrate its assistance strategies in the region.

**Humanitarian Impacts:** Water scarcity has profound implications for food security, livelihoods, and public health. The United Nations World Food Program [recently received a grant of JPY 5 billion](#) from Japan to support emergency food security initiatives in 15 countries across sub-Saharan Africa, focusing on vulnerable populations affected by conflict, climate shocks, and food shortages. If water shortages or water-related conflicts escalate, Japan's humanitarian assistance in Africa may need to be redirected to address the needs of the most-affected regions.

The CFA marks a major shift in the Nile Basin geopolitics, challenging traditional water-sharing practices and potentially weakening Egypt and Sudan's control. As upstream countries gain leverage, its impact on regional stability, development, and cooperation is significant. For Japan, given its substantial interests in African development and stability, these changes call for adjustments in diplomatic engagement and development aids. The international community must also recognize the risk of increased tensions, especially in the fragile Horn of Africa.

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