



©Arne Hoel

# BRINGING CITIZEN VOICES TO NILE BASIN DEVELOPMENT

The Nile River system is a vital economic lifeline across East Africa. Over 200 million people live in the basin of the world's longest river that stretches 6,695km. To ensure people's needs and risks are jointly addressed and that benefits reach the most vulnerable, it is critical to connect national and regional actors that direct the management and development of the river with the communities that depend on the river for food, energy, transport, and livelihoods. Yet in practical terms, weak institutional contexts and challenging political environments eclipse the participation of grassroots stakeholders in activities and decisions that most directly impact them.

The Nile Basin Discourse (NBD), an umbrella group for over 500 civil society organizations across the Nile Basin, is working to increase the influence of community voices in the management of Nile waters. With CIWA support, the NBD is taking key steps to enhance the voice of communities in the development of Nile Basin resources. First, the NBD is strengthening its ability to engage communities and stakeholders by mapping out its network, clarifying appropriate channels for communication, and adopting technology to expand its outreach. Also, it is strengthening operational relationships with regional development organizations (such as the Nile Basin Initiative and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development), disseminating information from these organizations to its member network, and facilitating stakeholder consultations for development projects. Further, the NBD is building capacity of civil society organizations across the basin and helping horizontal networking among these organizations to enable those working on similar themes in different parts of the basin to link with one another.

July 2016



**REGION:**  
Nile Basin



**COUNTRIES:**  
Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda



**FOCUS:**  
Connecting regional, national, and community-level stakeholders for improved development planning and equitable benefit sharing

## RESULTS

Strong stakeholder engagement in development planning empowers women, boosts cooperation, and builds climate resilience in a basin at risk of increasing water variability.

- Through civil society organizations, community leaders, elders, and coalitions, the Nile Basin Discourse (NBD) mapped out linkages between communities and national and regional players in Nile Basin development. This stakeholder map **enables project designers to communicate with the different types of resource users**, and to manage or resolve conflict. This ensures that benefits reach communities, particularly women and vulnerable people.
- The NBD trained 286 men and 136 women across 10 Nile countries on ways to manage climate risks. With improved understanding of changing temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns, floods, and droughts, **communities are better equipped to initiate adaptive actions and inform larger scale development projects** about their climate-related needs.
- A close working partnership between the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) and the NBD facilitated an iterative design process for the \$470 million Rusumo Falls Hydropower Project, **informing the investment's technical design and resulting in benefit-sharing arrangements among Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania**. The community consultations process addressed the needs of the most vulnerable people and minimized negative impacts, reducing the required resettlement from tens of thousands to just over 500 people.
- The NBD's partnerships with governments and regional development organizations is ensuring that **social concerns shape water, power, and commodity investments**. For example, NBD-led engagement influenced the \$3.4 million Baro-Akobo-Sobat Multipurpose Project in Ethiopia and Sudan – financed largely by the African Development Bank – to emphasize ecosystem health and cut poverty through post-conflict rehabilitation.

*“There was considerable stakeholder participation in the Rusumo Falls project – how would people be compensated, and so on. We’ve been able to mobilize all sorts of people: elders, women, and youth. People want to know the benefits of projects such as hydropower. If you don’t work with the people and people cannot see the benefits, the project will not be successful”*

—Emerita Mugorewicyeza, NBI, Regional Stakeholder Participation Specialist.

## CONTEXT

Civil society often remains removed from processes to evaluate, plan, and implement development projects. As countries in the Nile Basin ramp up efforts to tap into their massive water resources potential, lack of participation of civil society can limit the benefits that development processes provide for communities or result in benefits being inequitably distributed or unsustainable. The Nile is vital to East Africa, providing water that feeds fields and livestock, harboring fish and other aquatic resources, and allowing trade to flow from as far as Tanzania up through Egypt. Amidst increasing floods, droughts, and climate change impacts, connecting national governments and regional actors with communities becomes critical in order to effectively tailor resilience-building support to local contexts and reach the most vulnerable populations with timely assistance. The Nile Basin’s vast expanse and wide ranging diversity of its people’s cultures, languages, and concerns makes it even more important that outreach and support to civil society be carefully designed to be impactful.

## APPROACH

CIWA’s support focuses on enabling the NBD to establish itself as an organizationally efficient and institutionally sustainable stakeholder-engagement services provider in the basin. CIWA’s support also helps the NBD strengthen its partnerships with civil society organizations across the basin’s countries.

The NBD has forged close partnerships with the Nile Basin Initiative’s two investment arms – Eastern Nile Technical Regional Office (ENTRO) and Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Action Program (NELSAP). Utilizing strong ties to civil groups and local governments, the NBD helps craft agreements among communities and project developers about local needs, development opportunities, and benefit-sharing arrangements.

In one example, a community voiced concerns during consultations, led by the NBD for the Government of Uganda, around the Nyimur-Aswa Multipurpose Project – designed to provide irrigation, water supply, and soil conservation benefits in the Uganda-South Sudan border region – specifically regarding the proposed site of a project access road. Through stakeholder engagement, the NBD was able to understand the root of the concern was not regarding the road itself, but the location – livestock and grain farmers wanted to utilize



the road for trade. With that knowledge, the NBD helped the project developers to respond to community concerns, realigning the access road to allow cross-border trade. Based on this outcome, the Government of Uganda requested that the NBD participate in the national-level steering committee for the Nyimur-Aswa project alongside Ministries of Water and Agriculture. At local levels, a similar structure is replicated where NBD-affiliated civil society and non-governmental organizations work with local governments as part of the project’s local implementation steering committee.

## NEXT STEPS

CIWA aims to continue supporting the NBD to sharpen stakeholder engagement around investment projects. This includes engaging women in particular in its outreach, working to increase women in leadership roles in communities, and helping put greater emphasis on issues that differentially impact women.

## ABOUT CIWA

CIWA, the Cooperation in International Waters in Africa program, is a multi-donor trust fund representing a partnership between the World Bank and the governments of Denmark, the European Union, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. CIWA supports the governments in Sub-Saharan Africa in unlocking the potential for sustainable and inclusive growth, climate resilience, and poverty reduction through cooperative transboundary water management and development. Since 2011, CIWA has supported improving the social, environmental, and economic sustainability of transboundary investments worth US\$8.9 billion across Sub-Saharan Africa.

