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## **Challenges and Opportunities of Public Diplomacy in Ethio-Egyptian Relations on the Nile Water**

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### **Abstract:**

*The central objective of the study is to explore the Challenges and Opportunities of Public Diplomacy in Ethio-Egyptian Relations on the Nile Water since 2011. To this end, the researcher has employed the pure qualitative method. The data are mainly obtained from secondary sources and unstructured interviews, and the researcher has employed qualitative methods of narrative and discourse data analysis. The bilateral relations between Ethiopia and Egypt mainly found on the Nile issue. Thus, Egypt dispatched the first public diplomacy delegation to Ethiopia in April 2011 and the Ethiopian public diplomacy delegation to Egypt in December, 2014 represents a new positive development in the Ethio-Egyptian relations. Based on the data, the study outlined: the legacy of colonialism and the status quo attitudes; deficient in understanding about public diplomacy; finance and time limitations; and Limitations of public diplomacy professionals and literatures are the major obstacles of conducting public diplomacy. Whereas, a method of resolving the mistrusts and conflicts; modifying negative attitudes; avoiding one side role of politicians and medias; and facilitate to have common agreement or treaties are the major opportunities of public diplomacy. Thus, to conclude that, there is an encouraging start which gives rise to optimism and Public diplomacy most importantly improves these problems in the relations between the two countries and thereby could boost up the mutual utilization of the Nile water with trusts and confidences. Following this conclusion, the study suggests that Ethiopia and Egypt should work hard to build trusts and confidences for mutual utilization of the Nile water by strengthening the two people's relations via consolidating the public diplomacy roles, goals, and dimensions with having its own legal status, budgets, literature, professionals and coordination departments in their Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

**Keywords:** *Public diplomacy, soft power, Ethiopia, Egypt, Nile, mutual, qualitative, narrative, discourse, optimism*

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Overview of Public Diplomacy**

Tracing the historical evolution of public diplomacy is essential for providing a better and more accurate understanding of its concept. Even though the phrase "public diplomacy" is relatively new, it is an old phenomenon in international relations, which has prevailed for nearly as long as the concept of diplomacy itself. After the Franco-Prussian War, the French government sought to repair the nation's shattered prestige by promoting its language and literature through the Alliance Francaise created in 1883. The projection of French culture abroad became a significant component of French diplomacy and Italy, Germany, and others soon followed suit (Sonia, 2015).

Public diplomacy has also been an integral part of American history from its founding as a nation to its current superpower position. Firstly, it was by the American president Woodrow Wilson who was highly articulated the concept of public diplomacy to the Americans and the world during and after world war first (Zaharna, 2004).

Following the end of World War II, a bipolar world was created along ideological lines of Socialist and Capitalist camp led by the Soviet Union and the United States respectively. Deep ideological confrontation between the two camps prompted both sides to explore ways of directly addressing each other's public. Public diplomacy practiced at this stage mainly used radio broadcasting (Radio Free Europe) and cultural diplomacy as a major tool to reach out to people in communist countries (Tadesse, 2015).

The term “public diplomacy” was formally coined in 1965, when the dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, Edmund Gullion, established the Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy although the practice was already established by governments long before that date (Cull, 2009).

Finally, it was after September 11, 2001 American terrorists attack that public diplomacy has got prominence in the world and Public diplomacy is one area of activity that has acquired greater prominence on the agenda of policy-makers since 2001 (Foreign Affairs of Canada, 2006). Important developments of communication technology, advancements in satellite TV and internet as well as change in international relations that resulted on the proliferation of non-government actors were crucial factors in enhancing the need and importance of public diplomacy. In a context of multiple actors that play important roles in a way nation and their policies are perceived, it becomes ever crucial for governments to explain themselves to others (Tadesse, 2015).

### 1.2. What is Public Diplomacy?

Public diplomacy deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It includes dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of intercultural communications (Nicolas, 2009).

However, there is no consensus how public diplomacy should be defined or what it entails. Despite this, Public diplomacy is regarded as one of the most salient political communication issues of our times and practitioners and scholars alike pay increasing attention to it (Hartig, 2016).

Public diplomacy distinguishes itself from traditional diplomacy by targeting non-governmental publics, whereas traditional diplomacy concerns government-to-government relations. Most governments conduct public diplomacy to seek support for a policy or to promote an image, as well as to develop dialogs and build relationships in order to enhance understanding and co-create solutions to transnational problems (Ingrind d’Hooghe, 2015). Public diplomacy is inevitably linked to power. Soft power is based on intangible or indirect influences such as culture, values, and ideology (Snow, 2008).

Public diplomacy is therefore, an instrument that governments use to mobilize these resources to communicate with and attract the public of other countries, rather than merely their governments (Nye, 2008).

The practice of public diplomacy has largely been the domain of the rich and powerful states complementing with their foreign policy objectives. It is not only the practice, but also academic researches and literatures also largely focus on the experiences and practices of these same nations (Tadesse, 2015). However, unprecedented development of communication technologies, global and instantaneous reach of satellite news broadcasts and a broader change in international relations have made it necessary for countries, rich or poor, big or small, to engage in public diplomacy to further enhance the effective implementation of their foreign policy objectives (Nebiat, 2011).

The bilateral relations between Ethiopia and Egypt mainly found on the Nile issue. However, there is a challenge in building a trust on the use of equitable water. Ethiopia and Egypt failed to build confidence on one another for number of decades. Rather, the suspicions between the two countries are rife, due to that Egypt had been following in connection to the Nile monopoly and Ethiopia become the increasingly challenging of Egyptian monopoly use of the Nile water (Tesfaye, 2016).

According to Dessalegn (2016), Egypt has depended upon the waters of the Nile from times of antiquity. However, in spite of Egypt's hegemony over the Nile waters, Ethiopia has not only been claiming the right to use of Nile River but also have already been launching huge projects like Grand Renaissance Dam on the Nile River. But, Egypt has been discomforted with the projects that have been started in Ethiopia on the ground that it totally prejudices the interest of Egypt. On the other hand, Ethiopians have been claiming that Ethiopia has the right to use Nile waters as long as it not affects the interest of Egypt.

Thus, Egypt dispatched the first public diplomacy delegation to Ethiopia in April 2011, which comprised more than 50 persons covering the fields of politics, media, culture and economy. On the other hand, The Ethiopian public diplomacy delegation to Egypt in December, 2014 represents a new positive development in the Egyptian –Ethiopian relations since it is the first visit ever to the Ethiopian delegation to Cairo (Mostafa, 2015). In fact, the issue of the Nile water will remain central issue to Ethiopia and Egypt in the future and the major objective of this study will be explore the Challenges and Opportunities of Public Diplomacy in Ethio-Egyptian Relations on the Nile Water since 2011.

In framing the study, the following basic questions were raised.

- What are the obstacles of public diplomacy in Ethio-Egyptian relations on the Nile water since 2011?
- What are the opportunities of public diplomacy in Ethio-Egyptian relations on the Nile water since 2011?

## 2. Methods and Materials

This study is qualitatively designed to explore the Challenges and Opportunities of Public Diplomacy in Ethio-Egyptian Relations on the Nile Water since 2011. The major reason to choose qualitative approach is to ensure a larger degree of flexibility to develop the research question, collect data, and engage with the analysis simultaneously throughout the research process. New interesting elements and dynamics have appeared several times throughout the research process and being able to incorporate these into the paper has been vital (Creswell, 2012).

The researcher used both primary and secondary data, as well as the qualitative form of narrative and discourse data analysis. Interview and secondary sources like books, journal articles, internet sources, radio and television broadcasts, and published as well as unpublished material are the major source of the study.

### *2.1. Why Public Diplomacy on the Nile Water?*

When it comes to foreign relations, countries will always pursue their national interests. A different method has applicable to do this, including the use of soft power and hard power is indispensable to success. In the information age, soft power, this is the ability to shape what others want, projecting a positive image, stands tall as a technique to help achieve foreign policy goals. Indeed, public diplomacy through the employment of soft power has helped countries communicate values and achieve foreign policy objectives (Tadesse, 2015).

The rivalries between Egypt and Ethiopia have reemerged after Ethiopia proposal to build a Great Renaissance Dam (GRD) since 2011. Since its announcement the project has caused a diplomatic battle between Egypt and Ethiopia in the region. Ethiopian officials claim that the project is “win-win”, whereas Egyptians disagree, and some Egyptian politicians were even reported as saying “it might be better to bomb the dam or to arm Ethiopian guerrillas to pressure the government in Addis Ababa (Brabeck, 2013). The plan of Ethiopia has created great worry on the part of Egypt which is 97 percent dependent on the Nile waters and Egyptians consider the dam as a serious threat to their national interest as they believe that it will reduce the amount of water flow. As a result, Egyptians continuously released propagandas as to the measures they may take unless Ethiopia stops its project on Nile (Endalkachew, 2015)

Ethiopia’s approach to the GERD Project, as it has repeatedly emphasized, is essentially based on the principles of four pillars: a win-win approach, equitable and reasonable utilization, no significant harm and genuine cooperation. The sole objectives of the GERD are poverty eradication and support for regional integration (Getnet, 2014). Due to this, public diplomacy is the major tool to communicate the people of the two countries with new ideas and it is very important in the creations of trust, unity, and fraternity by avoiding conflicts among peoples and governments of Ethiopia and Egypt. This is especially true in the cases of limited contact and interaction with the other nation, as the lack of information and for a self-definition of a particular activity (Interview, 2017).

The major purpose of the GERD is to produce energy for electricity. This electricity is not only Ethiopia it is also for Egyptians to composite the scarcity of electricity in Egypt. In this regard, the role of public diplomacy is very significant to create understanding about the importance of GERD for Egyptian. In addition to this, public diplomacy is very important to support the traditional or government to government diplomacy and serve as alternative or supporting functions without undermining the government to government diplomacy and it will provide alternatives to solve problems (Interview, 2017).

### *2.2. Obstacles of Public Diplomacy in Ethio-Egyptian Relations on the Nile Water*

#### 2.2.1. The Legacy of Colonialism and the Status Quo Attitude

According to one Public Diplomacy, International Relations and Political Science Expert at Addis Ababa University, March 2017, Addis Ababa), the legacy of colonialism and the status quo attitudes are the major obstacles which bring negative name for the implementations of public diplomacy. Colonialism was the major turning point that intensifies competition and self-interest on the use of Nile water especially, on the side of Egypt. Egypt has been using this status quo without accepting recent win-win cooperation on the Nile water. On the other hand, the attitude of Egyptian about the Ethiopian action on the Nile water is negative because they considered the Nile water as a national security.

#### 2.2.2. Deficient in Understanding about Public Diplomacy

This is the other obstacle in the practice of public diplomacy between the two countries. According to the respondent stated, there is no consensus how public diplomacy should be defined or what it entails. Since the idea of public diplomacy is constructive and recently applicable practices, peoples did not have knowledge about nature, targets or goals, roles, and structure of public diplomacy. Due to this, public diplomacy highly challenged to achieve the overall aims (Interview, 2017).

On the other hand, some people consider the role of public diplomacy as propaganda. However, experts of public diplomacy clearly differentiated the two related concepts. Propaganda is one way of communication that serve only for the propagandists whereas public diplomacy is two-way communications that include feedback and listing of another party (Interview, 2017). In addition to this, the field of study is scarily studied and applied. There is knowledge and application paucity in the country concerning PD. There is the wide disparity between theoretically recognized PD and virtually practiced PD in Ethiopia as well as Lack of clear vision and understanding together with an absence of experienced PD professionals (Yonnas, 2013).

According to Ethiopian Religious Council Peace Building Director, March, 2017, Addis Ababa), some of the peoples and politicians considered the practice of public diplomacy as propaganda and they said no need of public diplomacy and the position is important than this kind public discussion. For example, the practice of public diplomacy between Ethiopia and Egypt is to depend on facts on the project of GERD but some of the politicians of Egypt who are from parliament, political parties and international Diasporas giving the hypothetical view on the practice of PD.

### 2.2.3. Finance and Time Limitations

The practice of public diplomacy is highly challenged by finance and time. Public diplomacy is not one side of communication like propaganda; it is two ways of communications which include feedbacks. Due to this, an activity of public diplomacy takes a long time to get feedback and it is difficult to see the results in a short period of time. Others hold that the activities associated with public diplomacy and the outputs of such activity are, by their very nature, difficult to quantify. Furthermore, the drive to measure activity leads to a false selection of measures to be adopted and as such is an unhelpful activity in a sphere in which governments have relatively little experience (Foreign Affairs of Canada, 2006).

Due to time taking nature of public diplomacy practice, there is not frequent implementation between Ethiopia and Egypt on the Nile River. However, only the GERD that enhance the implementation of public diplomacy somehow but it needs more implementation (Interview with Ministry of Water, Irrigation, and Energy of Ethiopia, Boundary and Trans- boundary Resources Vice-Director, March 2017, Addis Ababa).

### 2.2.4. Limitations of Public Diplomacy Professionals and Literatures

Limitation of public diplomacy professional, literature books and legal frameworks are the other challenges of public diplomacy practice between Ethiopia and Egypt. According to the expert at Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, Digital Diplomacy Director, March, 2017, Addis Ababa), the absence of literature, guideline books, and law framework are the other major challenges/ obstacles of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy needs accessible literature, books and law frameworks which used to enhancing the knowledge of peoples about the definition, nature, dimensions, role and subsets of public diplomacy.

Due to the absence of trained manpower and structured activities as well as the absence of public diplomacy understanding in the public of Ethiopia and Egypt. There is no legal-institutional activities, literature and books of public diplomacy in different places. Public diplomacy must include different stakeholders from differing parts of the society and by itself, public diplomacy depends on the talents and wisdom of public diplomacy delegations to attract the hearts and minds of Ethio- Egyptian publics by using truth and facts. However, it is difficult to organize the practice public diplomacy due to finance and material scarcity (Ibid).

## *2.3. Opportunity of Public Diplomacy in Ethio-Egyptian Relations on the Nile Water*

### 2.3.1. Serves as a Method of Resolving the Mistrusts and Conflicts

It is true that, following the coming into power of Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in Egypt, the two countries' relations seem turning into a better direction. Discussions on issues of common concern between governments of the two countries have come to be more regular and more frequent compared to what had been in the previous times. The current government of Egypt has been said that Egypt's relations with Ethiopia must be informed by cooperation and love, not hatred and belligerence as well as his government is transitioning Egypt from throwing about threats to forging cooperation (Tadesse, 2015).

Basically, the purpose of public diplomacy in the two countries is not selling the governmental policy but it is the method of resolving the mistrusts and misperceptions between Ethiopia and Egypt on the Nile water to establishing healthy bilateral relation on the day to day political and economic activities; to minimize competition by forming antagonistic group in the horn of Africa (Interview, 2017).

As the expert explains clearly, the public diplomacy provides opportunities and conducive environment in facilitating table dialogues and discussions because public diplomacy has advisory (advocating), rationality and legitimacy roles. It has the credibility of the government and the peoples of the country. It has also social interference on the foreign public horizontally not vertically. Public diplomacy has alternative solutions to reducing conflicts by creating awareness among the two peoples that water is life to Egypt which is exactly the same thing electricity to the life of the Ethiopians (Interview, 2017).

Therefore, nowadays there is a genuine discussion and talks between the two countries. The previous attitudes have been changing step by step. There is a betterment of mutual understanding. Both countries have reiterated having continuous genuine dialogues, which could help to strengthen the bilateral relations particularly in connection with the Nile Water. These are the outcomes of public diplomacy (Molla, 2015:34). Public diplomacy also encourages equitable and reasonable utilization of water resources. Furthermore, it engenders genuine cooperation amongst the two countries (Nurye, 2014).

In this regard, public diplomacy has started to change the age-old hostility and conflicts between Ethiopia and Egypt on the Nile water, and it has been becoming the alternative source of cooperation on the Nile water by supporting the official diplomacy (government to government diplomacy) as well as creating a good environment for the two countries common discussion for mutual utilization of the Nile water (Interview, 2017). On the other hand, people to people diplomacy has begun to show the reality that existed between Ethiopia and Egypt, especially it become the device to show the reality of the GERD project (Interview, 2017).

### 2.3.2. Modifying Negative Attitudes

Public diplomacy tries to build trust and fraternal relations between the peoples of Ethiopia and Egypt by avoiding negative attitudes on the Nile water. Moreover, public diplomacy has been deleting the wrong perceptions of Egyptians about

the GERD such as the dam will affect Egyptians, the dam has not quality, the dam will be disintegrated by a short period of time and other wrong information's. As noted by Tadesse (2015), public diplomacy has been creating positive attitude and perceptions between Ethiopia and Egypt on the ongoing process of Nile politics. Officials on the Ethiopian side states "Ethiopia fought Italians because of they went to colonize Ethiopia however Ethiopia do not want to fight Egyptian because of Ethiopian are not going to colonize Egyptian but to use its right to the Nile water for the reduction of the poverty impacts on Ethiopia and this is not 19 century, it is the 21 century of public diplomacy age for win-win cooperation. In line to this, Egyptians become confirming the above ideas (Interview, 2017).

As the above statement identifies, Ethiopia and Egypt have up and down relation on the Nile water and the Egyptian have been using the Nile water privacy as well as seeing Ethiopian as enemy of Egypt by suspicion that Ethiopian may block the Nile water. However, public diplomacy has paved the way to have positive attitude on the Nile water among the two peoples.

### 2.3.3. Avoiding One Side Role of Politicians and Medias

Public diplomacy provides information for international community of Egypt and Ethiopia by networking systems such as Facebook, twitter, Skype, email, radio, television satellite and others about the rights and obligations of Ethiopia and Egypt on the Nile water (i.e. the right to use the Nile water and the obligation to use the water commonly). As one expert at MOGC of Ethiopia outlined that

Talking with the vast people and talking with some officials have big different results. This means dealing the issue of Nile water by seeing and understanding through people participation brings trust and confidence than talking without the participations of the people and without observable evidence (Interview, 2017).

Any development can be successful through the involvements of people in different levels and it is the major instrument to divert the propagandas of the private Medias and hypothetical suggestions of politicians (Interview with Ethiopian Religious Council Peace Building Director, 2017, Addis Ababa). In this regard, one of the respondents at MWIEE outlined the practical observation facts as the following:

For example, during the last time public diplomacy delegation exchanges between Ethiopia and Egypt, there were 40 articles written by the participants of Egyptian public diplomacy delegations after coming to Ethiopia and all these articles have positive ideas about the Ethio-Egyptian relations. However, there are articles that are written by Egyptians in Egypt without understanding the facts and evidence that are existed in Ethiopia, and from these articles, no one wrote about positive things to Ethiopia because they did not see the fact as the public diplomacy delegation of Egyptians (Interview, 2017). In this world, participation of people become important tool to curve the one side of limited communication and public diplomacy becomes critical in terms of creating conductive environment for mutual utilization of the Nile water (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, 2016).

### 2.3.4. Facilitate to Have Common Agreement or Treaties

The public diplomacy starts to facilitate opportunities to have common agreement or treaties for common utilization of the Nile resources with including concerned stakeholders because the past treaties have permitted self-serving, fostering competition rather than cooperation. The treaties have not addressed the water problems in the two states and are ill-suited to promote future good relations among the basin states, given the strategic concern that impelled them in relation to the Nile, the securing of control over or access to its waters. In the absence of a comprehensive agreement, one cannot envision a cooperative system among the basin states. This could give rise to a scramble over the resource and ultimately lead to conflict (Interview, 2017)

In this regard, public diplomacy provides an opportunity of win-win agreement between the two states and it has values to renewed the existing treaties are either bilateral or were deliberately planned by colonial forces to serve the interest of one country particularly Egypt.

The colonial days are long and colonial pacts cannot be invoked to deprive Ethiopia from the water of the Nile. It is a well-known fact that the Nile water is not managed by modern laws and agreements but colonial deals that deliberately excluded the real stakeholders or owners of the water such as Ethiopia. It is clear that this cannot be acceptable reasoning in today's world. Today, all nations are governed not by 'the law of 'the might' and arrogance but by that the right and reasons. That is why Ethiopians once they knew they could have the resources to embark upon such projects, they began to do it (The Herald, 2017).

## **3. Conclusions**

When it comes to foreign relations, countries will always pursue their national interests. A different method has applicable to do this, including the use of soft power and hard power is indispensable to success. In the information age, soft power, which is the ability to shape what others want, projecting a positive image, stands tall as a technique to help achieve foreign policy goals. Indeed, public diplomacy through the employment of soft power has helped countries communicate values and achieve foreign policy objectives.

However, the legacy of colonialism and the status quo attitude; deficient in understanding about public diplomacy; finance limitation; longtime taking for implementation of public diplomacy; and absence of public diplomacy professional,

literature books, and legal frameworks are identified as the major obstacles for the implementations of public diplomacy between Ethiopia and Egypt on the Nile water.

Despite these challenges, public diplomacies have been creating positive attitude and perceptions between Ethiopia and Egypt for mutual utilization of the Nile water. Building common consensus over the utilization of the Nile water is the first role of public diplomacy in Ethio-Egyptian relation on the Nile water. In this regard, the role of public diplomacy is not ignored because of it has a credibility that depends on facts and truths that what actions are taking on the Nile water by Ethiopia and Egypt. This will make Ethiopia and Egypt have trusted and they will have more cooperation than competition on the Nile water.

Secondly, Public diplomacy has facilitating the ways to have common legal institutional frameworks between Ethiopia and Egypt for mutual utilization of the Nile water through creating clear understanding about the past exclusive colonial treaties through people discussion. Since public diplomacy is based on open and collective discussions, it will provide an opportunity of win-win agreements between the two states and it has values to renewed the existing Treaties are either bilateral or were deliberately planned by colonial forces to serve the interest of one or two countries.

Thirdly, public diplomacy has creating proper understanding of the reality about the GERD project towards Egyptians and paved the way to have common instruments, a source of information systems and knowledge. It can help also to have a two-side role of media and Politicians in terms of narrowing the gaps what existed between Ethiopia and Egypt through public discussions. If the people have clear evidence and facts through public diplomacy, the one side role or propaganda of politicians and Medias become nothing to affect the relation between the two countries.

Moreover, public diplomacy has changes the hostile Ethio-Egyptian diplomatic relation on the Nile water through the major elements of public diplomacy such as listing, advocacy, citizen exchange, cultural exchanges and international broadcasting systems.

Nevertheless, public diplomacy has started to change the age-old conflicts between Ethiopia and Egypt on the Nile water, and it has been becoming the alternative source of cooperation on the Nile water by supporting the official diplomacy (government to government diplomacy) as well as creating a good environment for the two countries common discussion for mutual utilization of the Nile water. And nowadays there is a genuine discussion and talks between the two countries. The previous attitudes have been changing step by step. Following this conclusion, the study suggests that Ethiopia and Egypt should work hard to build trusts and confidences for mutual utilization of the Nile water by strengthening the two people's relations via consolidating the public diplomacy roles, goals, and dimensions with having its own legal status, budgets, literature, professionals and coordination departments in their Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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