

The Children of the Nile Initiative: Inaugural Summit Report

"Unity in Diversity: One River, One Future"

6–7 September 2025 | Virtual Conference

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Jimma University/Ecopia Group

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1. Executive Summary

The inaugural summit of the Children of the Nile Initiative successfully convened online on 6--7 September 2025, marking a historic, citizen-driven step towards transforming the Nile River from a source of potential contention into a catalyst for regional cooperation.

The event brought together **179 registered participants** from across all **11 Nile Basin nations** and the diaspora. Over two days, they engaged in high-level plenary sessions and thematic working groups, producing joint declarations and action plans that will inform both the upcoming GERD inauguration and long-term basin-wide cooperation.

Key outcomes included:

- Establishment of a **Nile Basin University & Research Network**.
- Drafting of a **Charter for Ethical Use of AI & Data**.
- Agreement on a **Nile Climate Cooperation Pledge** by CSOs.
- Proposal of a **Nile Youth & Digital Academy**.
- Cultural and artistic frameworks for a **2026 Nile Festival**.

2. Summit Participation

- **Total Participants:** 179
- **Countries of participation:** 9 countries from Nile (including Egypt, Kenya, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Rwanda, Sudan, Congo, Burundi), South Africa, America, India, Germany.
- **Profiles:** Academics/Researchers (39.5%), Youth (24.9%), CSOs (17.5%), Artists, Entrepreneurs, Media.
- **Gender:** Male (76%), Female (24%).
- **Languages:** Working language was English but the language used in communication has been English (79%), French (20%), with some Arabic and Amharic participation.

3. Summit Process & Adjustments

The summit was structured around one opening plenary followed by six thematic working groups.

However, adjustments were made:

- **Art & Sport Working Group:** After initial discussions, Artist Desalegn Hailu decided to adjourn the group's formal session, instead contributing cultural insights across *all* working groups. A proposal for the Children of the Nile Festival 2026 was drafted for later discussion.
- **Youth & Innovation:** This group requested to merge with **AI & Cybersecurity**, recognizing the natural overlap of youth-led digital innovation and digital governance.
- **Enterprises & Private Sector:** This group, though small, was highly effective and submitted its final report. Key outcomes included proposals for a Nile Basin Business Charter, the establishment of a digital platform for business collaboration, stronger links with academic research, and advocacy for the ratification of the AfCFTA.
- **Universities:** The group conducted a full session and submitted a comprehensive report.
- **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):** The group conducted a full session and submitted a comprehensive report.

4. Outcomes of Thematic Working Groups

4.1 Universities & Research

Chairs: Dr. Jemal Abafita (Jimma University, Ethiopia), Prof. Mammo Muchie (TUT, South Africa/Ethiopia)

- Established the **Nile Basin University & Research Network** with Jimma University as secretariat.
- Three research pillars identified:
 1. **Strengthening the Science of Shared Resources** (sediment, watershed, renewable energy).
 2. **Nile Basin Knowledge Platform** (shared data & digital collaboration hub).
 3. **Scholarship of Sustainability** (environmental and social stewardship).
- **Message to GERD:** The GERD is recognized as *"a catalyst for shared knowledge, research, and prosperity across the basin."*

4.2 Digital Guardians of the Nile (AI, Cybersecurity & Youth Innovation)

Chairs: Dr. Mitslall Kifleyesus-Matschie (Ethiopia/Germany), Dr. Jennifer Batamuliza (Rwanda), Felix Matschie (Ethiopia/Germany)

- Drafted the **Charter for Ethical Use of AI & Data** in the Nile Basin.
- Proposal for a **Nile Basin AI & Digital Innovation Consortium**.
- Youth-led contributions: plan for a **Nile Digital Academy** and **Youth Tech Startup Network**.
- **Message to GERD:** *"We pledge to harness AI, cybersecurity, and youth innovation as forces for peace, transparency, and shared prosperity."*

4.3 Art, Culture & Sport

Chair: Artist Desalegn Hailu (Ethiopia)

- Group adjourned its own session to allow integration of cultural/artistic perspectives across all working groups.
- Draft concept prepared for **Children of the Nile Festival 2026**.
- Art identified as a cross-cutting element of the Initiative, ensuring cultural identity enriches each sector.

4.4 Civil Society & Climate Mitigation

Chairs: Dr. Gezehen Kebede (Ethiopia), Ato Endeshaw Mogessie (Ethiopia)

The CSO working group had a vibrant and open deliberation anchored on an in-depth understanding of the role of Civil Society Organizations in shaping community attitudes and beliefs. The group produced the following outcomes:

1. Statement of Principles for CSO Collaboration

The premise for any collaboration is an initial willingness to unite in minds and actions. With this understanding the principles for CSO collaboration should revolve around the following key areas:

- Be inclusive of all the eleven Riparian Nile countries.
- Focus on building trust and synergies of thoughts and activities.
- Embrace a positive attitude.
- Be result oriented.
- Collaborate beyond water-related issues.
- Be people centered.

2. Joint Advocacy and Action Themes

Changes in attitudes and beliefs happen through concerted effort and well-designed advocacy. The following are initial advocacy action themes:

- Advancing fair and equitable solutions to problems from unfair/unjust trade practices.
- Care for climate and environmental justice.
- Safe, and free/open movement of people across countries.
- Public diplomacy focused on promoting people-centered and locally owned solutions.

3. CSO Platform Structure and Modality

A structured institutional modality is paramount for successful delivery of activities and building effective relationships. The suggested structure for the CSO platform needs a cross-country dimension, open to all eleven countries, with a clear governance structure, communication modalities, and membership protocols governed by a robust code of conduct. Detailed terms of reference are under preparation.

- **Message to GERD:** *"We, the civil society organizations and community guardians of the Nile, stand united in our commitment to a peaceful, prosperous, and climate-resilient future for all its people. We celebrate the GERD as a symbol of African innovation and urge that its operation be guided by the principles of ecological sustainability, equitable benefit-sharing, and unwavering cooperation. We pledge to hold our leaders accountable and to work hand-in-hand across borders to protect our shared lifeline for generations to come."*

4.5 Enterprises of the Nile (Private Sector & Entrepreneurship)

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Chair: Christoph Schneider-Yattara (Germany/Ethiopia)

Panelists: Mika Chavala (Tanzania), Irvine Floreale Murame (Burundi), Elizabeth Anon (South Sudan), Ange Muco Muyubira (Burundi), Aster Rosentreter (Ethiopia/Germany)

The working group, though small, had a rich discussion and excellent deliberations. Participants shared their entrepreneurial journeys and exchanged visions for closer collaboration as Nile Basin entrepreneurs. Key outcomes included:

1. Development of a joint project with contributions from all members based on expertise.
2. Establishment of a digital platform for sharing business information.
3. Collaboration with the academic track for enhanced business research and data.
4. Creation of a formal network for concrete collaboration.
5. Building of a diaspora and African regional institutional network.
6. Emphasis on trust as the foundation for successful business undertakings.
7. Advocacy for ratification of the AfCFTA agreement to boost free flow of goods and people.

Adopted: Nile Basin Business Charter

Preamble: We, the entrepreneurs and business leaders of the Nile Basin, commit to economic unity, affirming the Nile as a source of prosperity and peace.

Principles:

- Peaceful coexistence as the foundation of growth.
- Sustainable and inclusive development.
- Innovation, trade, and investment across borders.
- Equal opportunities for women, youth, and diaspora.
- Stewardship of the environment and shared resources.

Commitments:

- Build regional value chains in agriculture, manufacturing, and services.
- Facilitate cross-border trade and integration.
- Create decent jobs and inclusive opportunities.
- Partner with governments, financiers, institutions, and civil society.

Adopted GERD Private Sector Message:

"We, the entrepreneurs and business leaders of the Nile Basin, recognize the immense economic potential that flows from cooperation. We pledge to build bridges through commerce and to invest in our shared future, fostering peaceful coexistence, sustainable growth, and prosperity for all communities along the Nile River."

5. Conclusion & Path Forward

The inaugural summit of the Children of the Nile Initiative exceeded expectations. Despite a preparation period of just two months, nearly all Nile countries were represented, and over 70 experts contributed substantively to group outputs.

Unified GERD Messages from the Children of the Nile Initiative

1. Universities & Research

"The GERD is a catalyst for shared knowledge, research, and prosperity across the Basin. We see it as a living laboratory for cooperation in science, water management, and sustainable development."

2. Digital Guardians of the Nile (AI, Cybersecurity & Youth Innovation)

"We pledge to harness artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and youth innovation as forces for peace, transparency, and shared prosperity, ensuring that digital transformation strengthens trust and equity across the Nile Basin."

3. Art, Culture & Sport

"We celebrate the GERD as more than a dam --- it is a cultural bridge, a symbol of unity, and an inspiration for future generations of Nile citizens through art, culture, and sport."

4. Civil Society & Climate Mitigation

"We, the civil society organizations and community guardians of the Nile, stand united in our commitment to a peaceful, prosperous, and climate-resilient future for all its people. We celebrate the GERD as a symbol of African innovation and urge that its operation be guided by the principles of ecological sustainability, equitable benefit-sharing, and unwavering cooperation. We pledge to hold our leaders accountable and to work hand-in-hand across borders to protect our shared lifeline for generations to come."

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