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The role of science and technical expertise in the development of 'alternative water sources' within the Nile Basin's developmental discourse, a positive sum endeavor

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Within hydro-political literature the low intensity conflict over use of the Nile's waters between upstream and downstream riparians over the past half century has become a reference point. Although the roots of the low intensity conflict were born in the colonial era of last century, the basic grievances voiced by successive political and civil society actors upstream on the Nile have remained the same, that their development through utilisation of the Nile's waters is hampered due to the colonial bi-lateral legal treaty system that excludes them. The high degree of water scarcity, demographic growth and underdevelopment in Nile Basin riparians has made use of the Nile's waters a politically loaded issue, even a *casus belli* in past decades. In the century that has passed since the first treaty on the Nile was signed in 1929, water science and the international law of freshwater resources have developed in leaps and bounds. In legal academic terms 'equitable utilisation and participation' as defined in the UN Watercourses Convention has become accepted as the legal doctrine that governs use of a river between its riparians. However the Watercourses Convention has not yet come into effect due to an insufficient number of ratifying states. In the deliberations over the Convention the issue of 'alternative water sources' was of particular contention. 'Alternative water sources' refers to freshwater that is not directly linked to the hydrological unit of the river basin in question, this can refer to groundwater found in

aquifers, rainfall and even soil water which is highly dependent on the porosity of the soil in the area or riparian in question. On a hypothetical level it is not complex to see why the issue of ‘alternative water sources’ could be a cause for political disagreement. However from a scientific viewpoint the possible benefits to be gained from monitoring, modeling and developing ‘alternative water sources’, such as rainwater harvesting are being accepted within the Nile Basin’s hydro-political discourse.