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Paper: “Renaissance Dam and Development in Ethiopia: National Gains and Regional Losses”

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Peer review:

Reviewer 1: Ekaterine Kardava
Gori State University, Georgia

Reviewer 2: Dionise Arakaza
Faculty of Political Science and Law, University of Burundi

Reviewer 3: Blinded

Reviewer 4: Blinded

ESJ Manuscript Evaluation Form 2025

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University/Country: Gori State University, Georgia	
Date Manuscript Received: 14.01.2026	Date Review Report Submitted:
Manuscript Title: <i>RENAISSANCE DAM AND DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA: NATIONAL GAINS AND REGIONAL LOSSES</i>	
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Evaluation Criteria:

Please give each evaluation item a numeric rating on a 5-point scale, along with a thorough explanation for each point rating.

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Rating Result</i> [Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]
1. The title is clear and it is adequate to the content of the article.	5
<i>(Please insert your comments)</i>	
2. The abstract presents objects, methods, and results.	4
It would be useful if the abstract (which is a key “scientific communication” tool) more clearly and explicitly articulated why this topic is being studied, what outcomes the study seeks to achieve, and by what methodological approach. A strong abstract messages should immediately capture the interest of the scholarly community and the reader.	
3. There are a few grammatical errors and spelling mistakes in this article.	5
<i>(Please insert your comments)</i>	
4. The study methods are explained clearly.	4

<i>(Please insert your comments)</i>	
5. The results are clear and do not contain errors.	4
<i>(Please insert your comments)</i>	
6. The conclusions or summary are accurate and supported by the content.	4
<i>(Please insert your comments)</i>	
7. The references are comprehensive and appropriate.	5
<i>(Please insert your comments)</i>	

Overall Recommendation (mark an X with your recommendation) :

Accepted, no revision needed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accepted, minor revision needed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Return for major revision and resubmission	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reject	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments and Suggestions to the Author(s):

I found both the subject matter and the research focus of the article highly interesting. It introduced me to a field that has not previously been part of my professional or academic work. The authors have brought a highly important issue into the scientific discourse.

The article addresses the implications of an infrastructure project (in this case, a water dam) for the development of three countries (politics, conflicts, economy). Regrettably, this topic does not fall within my primary field of scientific and academic expertise, and some of the issues I raise may therefore be unintentionally misinterpreted by the authors. From my perspective, however, my aim is to engage with questions of a more general scientific nature rather than with narrowly defined disciplinary concerns.

The article is highly interesting; however, it remains confined to a largely local analytical framework. It would be valuable to further develop it so that it could serve as a case study and precedent in the policy field of international relations, conflict resolution or economic development planning. In particular, it could illustrate how the international community or relevant international actors such as donors, investors, development partners, or decision-makers should approach the implementation of economic projects with transboundary effects (in this case, affecting three countries). Beyond economic efficiency, such projects should also be assessed in terms of their political, ethnical/national, and other substantively interconnected consequences over the long term. In other words, it would be beneficial to examine this case as a precedent, identifying both the positive and negative outcomes of such a project and determining what should be taken into account **methodologically, politically, and legally** in future initiatives of this kind.

The article formulates the research objective as follows: *“The study aims to analyse the Ethiopian gains from the Renaissance Dam and to analyse the main reasons for the dam, whether it is to develop Ethiopia economically and politically or to control the flow of water to Sudan and Egypt”*.

This formulation frames the research question as if these two circumstances were mutually

exclusive, whereas in reality they are not necessarily contradictory. The dam may simultaneously contribute to Ethiopia's economic and political development while also enabling control over water flows. (and this could be a fact from the very beginning). **From the perspective of the reader, it is unclear what was stipulated in the project's founding documentation and policy framework. It remains uncertain whether the regulation/control of transboundary water flows by Ethiopia was explicitly included among the project's original objectives,** which makes the binary framing of the research aim analytically problematic. It would be interesting to examine what was documented in the project and related materials (founding documentation). If the current control mechanisms implemented by Ethiopia diverge from what was originally agreed upon or documented, this in itself would constitute an important insight.

The study further states that it aims "*The study also aims to assess the potential threats to Sudan and Egypt due to the dam, whether in terms of water security, threatening the geopolitical balance, or the environment.*" However, it is not sufficiently clear what concrete scientific or practical contribution such an assessment is intended to generate. Given that the project has already been implemented, the added value of retrospectively analysing its **impacts - whether for theory building, policy learning, or future decision-making** - should be more explicitly articulated. Clarifying this point would substantially strengthen the analytical relevance and practical usefulness of this part of the study.

In the conclusion part, several points largely reiterate what has already been stated in the introduction and the main body of the article (for example, general observations about Ethiopia as a country and the economic, political, and social significance of the dam..). A strong conclusion, however, should not primarily restate facts that are already well known or already discussed in the text. Instead, it should identify what went wrong in the governance and international management of this major economic project: what mistakes were made by international actors or decision-makers, why no effective agreement has been reached among the three countries since 2011, and **which methodological, political, and legal criteria** should guide the international community or sector or the proposed tripartite committee in the future so that past failures are not repeated.

The conclusion should also offer concrete recommendations, including how Ethiopia could be prevented from unilaterally controlling water flows to the detriment of the other two countries. Most importantly, it should clearly articulate the study's original contribution: a new insight, a new evaluative criterion, or a new set of policy-relevant recommendations that would have practical value for the future planning and implementation of large transboundary infrastructure projects and for the prevention and resolution of regional conflicts.

Finally, I would like to ask the authors not to view my comments as criticism, but rather as an expression of genuine interest in addressing the more problematic dimensions of such processes and policy choices. I hope that at least some of my observations will be received in the constructive spirit in which they are offered, as they are motivated solely by the aim of strengthening the article's scientific and analytical contribution.

Comments and Suggestions to the Editors Only:

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Date Manuscript Received: 08/01/2026	Date Review Report Submitted: 11/01/2026
Manuscript Title: Renaissance Dam and Development In Ethiopia: National Gains and Regional Losses	
ESJ Manuscript Number: 0119/26	
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Evaluation Criteria:

Please give each evaluation item a numeric rating on a 5-point scale, along with a thorough explanation for each point rating.

Questions	Rating Result [Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]
1. The title is clear and it is adequate to the content of the article.	5
<i>The title is clear, accurate, and well aligned with the article’s focus on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and its domestic and regional implications. It effectively conveys the main analytical contrast between national benefits and regional costs.</i>	
2. The abstract presents objectives, methods, and results.	4
<i>The abstract clearly presents the topic, objectives, and main conclusions, but it does not specify the research methodology and only loosely states the results, making it more descriptive than analytical.</i>	
3. There are a few grammatical errors and spelling mistakes in this article.	4.5
<i>The article presents a valuable and timely analysis of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and its regional implications. However, there are a few grammatical errors and spelling</i>	

<i>mistakes throughout the manuscript that should be corrected to enhance clarity and readability.</i>	
4. The study methods are explained clearly.	3
<i>The study's general approach (comparative, descriptive–analytical) is stated in the introduction, but the methodology is not clearly presented in the abstract.</i>	
5. The results are clear and do not contain errors.	5
<i>The article provides a comprehensive and well-structured analysis of the GERD project, effectively balancing Ethiopia's developmental gains with the regional impacts on Egypt and Sudan. The use of empirical data, historical context, and theoretical frameworks strengthens the study, and the discussion of cooperative solutions adds practical relevance.</i>	
6. The conclusions or summary are accurate and supported by the content.	5
<i>The conclusion accurately reflects the content of the article, effectively summarising Ethiopia's gains from the GERD and the regional impacts on Egypt and Sudan. It is well-supported by the analysis throughout the paper and logically integrates the discussion of water diplomacy and cooperative solutions.</i>	
7. The references are comprehensive and appropriate.	5
<i>The references are comprehensive, current, and highly relevant to the topic. They include a mix of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, reports, theses, and official agreements, covering hydro politics, economics, environmental impacts, and regional cooperation related to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. The list demonstrates thorough research and appropriately supports the content of the paper.</i>	

Overall Recommendation (mark an X with your recommendation) :

Accepted, no revision needed	
Accepted, minor revision needed	X
Return for major revision and resubmission	
Reject	

Comments and Suggestions to the Author(s):

Comments and Suggestions to the Editors Only: