

# AFRICA PROGRAMS 2014



THE NILE  
PROJECT



# THE NILE PROJECT



The Nile Project was founded in 2011 by Egyptian ethnomusicologist Mina Girgis and Ethiopian-American singer Meklit Hadero to address the Nile Basin's cultural and environmental challenges. Using music, education, and innovation programs, the Nile Project inspires, informs, and empowers university students to work together to foster the sustainability of their ecosystem.

For the Nile Basin to be sustainable, its inhabitants must be connected, its governance participatory, and its communities resilient. Despite ancient relations among East African civilizations, the 437 million citizens of the 11 nations sharing the longest river in the world have few avenues to connect beyond their state borders. Opaque political processes and uninformed populations lacking environmental understanding hinder democratic participatory governance. Insufficient institutional capacity, infrastructure, and funding prevent Nile communities from adapting to social pressures and environmental threats.

The Nile Project curates collaborations among musicians from the 11 Nile countries to expose audiences to the cultures of their river neighbors. These musical experiences foster cross-cultural empathy and inspire environmental curiosity to shift the Nile from a divisive geopolitical argument to a uniting East-African conversation. In partnership with local universities, interactive workshops and free online courses educate students and help them discover their unique roles in creating a more sustainable Nile Basin. The Nile Prize channels this newly acquired cultural empathy and environmental understanding towards concrete action by inspiring university students to become the change makers who will pioneer innovative solutions that drive the sustainability of the Nile ecosystem. Throughout this mobilization process, the Nile Project's website supports program participants by providing online tools that facilitate multilingual dialogue and interdisciplinary collaborations.

+1.415.234.3952  
+20.115.018.3377  
[info@nileproject.org](mailto:info@nileproject.org)

# THE NILE PROBLEM

The longest river in the world runs through the political borders of 11 East African countries. Due to population growth, climate change and ecosystem degradation, Nile countries are increasingly challenged to satisfy their booming water, food, energy, and employment needs.

This mounting resource scarcity has contributed to a geopolitical conflict between upstream and downstream riparian states. East Africa's leaders have struggled to address their nations' escalating water and energy requirements and to transcend this conflict. Tremendous political capital has been expended over the last two decades to draft the Nile Cooperative Framework Agreement, an international treaty to govern water distribution and infrastructure projects. While the agreement has yet to win mutual consensus, the arduous negotiation process has exposed the deep-seated mistrust that has long characterized Nile relations. Meanwhile, many national undertakings aimed at improving water and energy resource utilization have been hampered by this overwhelming deficit in international dialogue.

One of the primary obstacles to productive dialogue is that the Nile has not historically been conceptualized as a shared ecosystem that connects its residents with each other and with their natural environment. Media portrays the Nile conflict as a zero-sum game, with clear winners and losers, rather than an opportunity to develop solutions that are mutually beneficial for both upstream and downstream communities.

Civil society organizations have typically focused on separate aspects of the conflict, rather than looking at the challenges as interconnected and interdependent. At the grassroots level, individual citizens are isolated from each other, lacking space to come together and exchange knowledge, skills and resources. The result is a pervasive mistrust that precludes cooperation toward a sustainable future for the Nile and the communities whose livelihoods depend on it.

This latent conflict has recently escalated to occupy international headlines. On 28 May 2013, the Ethiopian government diverted the Blue Nile in preparation for the construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam, the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa. Coming two days before the dam's environmental impact study was due to be presented to the committee overseeing the project, this event was met in Egypt with surprise and hostility. In Ethiopia, plans for the dam had been highly publicized and widely celebrated. In a nationally televised meeting of Egyptian political party leaders with the then president Morsi, military retaliation strategies were openly discussed. "We will defend each drop of Nile water with our blood if necessary," Morsi announced at a conference days later. While most experts have historically ruled out war as a practical means to resolve international water conflicts, this recent diplomatic crisis demonstrates the degree to which the citizens of Nile countries are polarized. Nile Basin communities have become increasingly antagonized and addressing these unsustainable relations has become an urgent priority.

## 1 PERCEPTION

Nile is not seen as one interconnected system

## 2 ACCESS

No space for citizen dialogue and community participation

## 3 CAPACITY

Nile communities lack the ability to adapt to new environmental and social pressures



# THE NILE PROJECT MODEL

The Nile Project proposes an innovative model that transcends the Nile conflict by leveraging the capacity of music to transform cross-cultural attitudes, generate political will, and foster citizen dialogues and collaborations. The Nile Project harnesses the creative potential of youth by focusing its education, dialogue, and innovation programs on university students. With an eagerness and curiosity that enables them to look at old challenges in new ways, students hold potential to be leading change makers for the Nile. The rising youth bulge and mounting unemployment among recent graduates present both a need and an opportunity to foster the development of a dynamic, sustainable, and creative economy in East Africa. Through the Nile Prize, the project hopes to incentivize and empower students to acquire entrepreneurial skills and design relevant solutions for the Nile and its communities.

The Nile Project's music is a metaphor for the initiative's approach to conflict transformation. Based on Otto Scharmer's U-process, Art of Hosting facilitation methods and biomimicry principles, Nile Project cofounder Mina Girgis has developed an innovative model of musical collaboration to propose a new way for Nile citizens to organize themselves in order to overcome their political and environmental challenges. The success of these collaborations exemplifies the potential for cross-cultural dialogue and participatory leadership to transform the Nile from a conflict-ridden subject into an opportunity for mutual benefit. These cross-cultural musical conversations produce a new sound that helps audiences to grasp the depth of their shared cultural connections. In the process, audiences begin to appreciate their Nile cultural identities and value their Nile citizenship.

## 1 MUSICAL COLLABORATIONS

featuring diverse musicians, instruments and styles from the 11 Nile countries expose local audiences to the cultures of their river neighbors. These musical experiences foster cultural empathy and inspire environmental curiosity to shift the Nile from a divisive geopolitical argument to a uniting East African conversation.

## 2 EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

build on the paradigm shifts experienced through music to provide avenues for students to learn about the Nile's cultural and ecological contexts. Partnering with universities, the project will lead interactive workshops and offer free online courses that expose students to the Nile's cultures, challenges, and opportunities.

## 3 THE NILE PRIZE

is an annual student innovation competition focused on Nile sustainability. Acting as the capstone to our university programs, the Nile Prize will channel this new understanding toward action by incentivizing students to develop innovative solutions to the Nile's social, cultural, environmental, and economic challenges.

# AFRICA PROGRAMS 2014

## JAN

### **Second Nile Gathering**

In January 2014, the Nile Project will organize its second Nile Gathering at the Ndere Cultural Center in Kampala, Uganda. During this 2-week music residency, Nile Project directors Mina Girgis and Miles Jay will lead 18 participating artists through a series of structured musical improvisations. With the help of sound engineers, these collaborative compositions will culminate in the Nile Project's second album as well as a set to be performed during the Africa Tour.

## FEB - MAR

### **Nile Project Concerts**

Immediately thereafter, the project will begin its 2014 Africa Tour. With dates in Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Egypt among other African countries, we hope to build on our 2013 success by featuring a more diverse cast of musicians and programming a more extensive itinerary.

### **Nile Workshops**

Following each of the concerts on the Africa Tour, Nile Project facilitators will lead interactive workshops for university students and community members to examine their understanding of the Nile's political, social, economic, and environmental challenges. By showcasing the work of civil society partners, the facilitators will move the conversation from challenges to opportunities - making the case for innovative solutions and assisting students in discovering their unique roles in contributing to the multifaceted sustainability of the Nile ecosystem.

### **Nile Prize Information Sessions**

During the Africa Tour, Nile Prize info sessions will take place after the Nile Workshops to lay out the 2014 competition process and theme (Food Sovereignty).

## APR - DEC

### **Dialogue & Collaboration Platform**

Embedded on the Nile Project website, the Nile Project dialogue and collaboration platform will support all our programs and serve as an interactive multilingual resource hub for students, professors, and community members to discuss topics relevant to Nile sustainability.

### **Online Course**

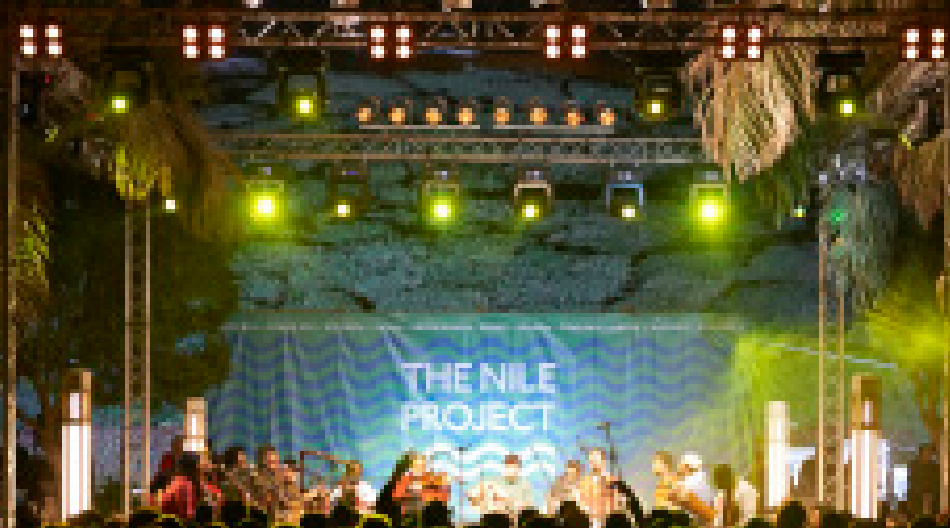
During Spring 2014, the Nile Project will offer its 1st free Nile Course via a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform. Designed to provide a multidisciplinary introduction to the Nile, this course will cover the cultural, economic, political, geographical, and environmental dimensions of the river ecosystem, the myriad ways they are interconnected, and the region's contemporary challenges. This course aims to raise awareness, facilitate dialogue and the exchange of ideas between students from different backgrounds, and challenge students to view these complex issues through diverse disciplines and cultures.

### **Nile Prize Competition**

With support from faculty and civil society, students will develop and submit their projects over two selection rounds (May and September). In December 2014, finalists will be invited to a Nile Gathering where they will collaborate with others on strengthening their projects and the winners will be selected by the prize jury.

# Africa Tour

winter 2014



Date	Location	Venue
February 8	Kampala, Uganda	National Theater
February 10	Jinja, Uganda	Mezzanine
February 15	Zanzibar, Tanzania	Sauti Za Busara Festival
February 23	Nairobi, Kenya	Safaricom Jazz Festival
February 25	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	African Philanthropy Forum
February 27	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	National Museum
March 5	Cairo, Egypt	Azhar Park
March 7	Aswan, Egypt	Nubian Museum
March 11	Alexandria, Egypt	Bibliotheca Alexandrina

"It's a refreshing change to see and hear East Africa flexing its powerful musical muscle along the river Nile."

Simon Broughton, **BBC World Routes**

# NILE PROJECT TEAM

## MINA GIRGIS – executive director



Mina Girgis is an ethnomusicologist and entrepreneur who specializes in curating and producing innovative collaborations across diverse musical styles. Relying on an extensive background in hospitality, Mina explores new ways to design environments conducive to learning, making, and experiencing music. In 2009, he founded Zambaleta, a nonprofit community World Music school based in San Francisco. In 2011, Mina created The Nile Project. Mina earned his bachelor in Hospitality from Florida State University and his MA in Ethnomusicology from the University of California Santa Barbara.

## MILES JAY – musical director



Miles Jay is a multi instrumentalist and composer, dedicated to developing the role of his primary instrument, the contrabass, in Arabic, Turkish, and Greek music. From his roots in Jazz and Classical music, Miles followed his love of Mediterranean music to live and work as a musician for the past 6 years in Egypt, Lebanon, and Crete, with artists including Youssou N'Dour, Naseer Shamma, Ziad Rahbani, Ross Daly, Zohar Fresco, Niyaz, Ali Jihad Racy, Zeid Hamdan, and the Cairo Opera Orchestra.

## BRENDON JOHNSON – development director



Brendon is an international development and social entrepreneurship specialist. He has co-designed social entrepreneurial projects and developed and ran multiple fundraising programs in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Europe. Previous to the Nile Project, Brendon worked with Nahdet el Mahrousa, an incubator for Egyptian social enterprises, where he advised entrepreneurs on financial sustainability and communications. Brendon is a Rotary Scholar with a BA in Political Science from West Chester University and a MA in Chinese Development from the University of Hong Kong.

## MEKLIT HADERO – co-founder



Meclit is a critically acclaimed Ethiopian-American singer, musician and cultural activist based in San Francisco, CA. She has been an artist-in-residence at NYU, has completed musical commissions for the Fund for Artists, the Brava Theater, and the De Young Museum, and was recently awarded the 2012 TED Senior Fellowship with the Nile Project as her main focus. She is the co-founder of the Nile Project and the Arba Minch Collective.

## ALEXIS ORTIZ – music program manager



Alexis has been working in the field of international arts administration and cultural exchange for nearly a decade. She has managed several cultural diplomacy programs in conjunction with the US State Department, led service-learning programs for college students and adults in the global south, and produced tours and performances with artists from all over the world. She holds a BA in Political Science and Latin American Studies from Yale University and an MA in International Administration, with a concentration in Culture and Development, from the University of Miami.

## SARAH DAVIDSON – program manager



Sarah works on water resource management, transboundary water sharing, and community participation and is informed by a decade of living and working throughout the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America. She holds a double MA in Natural Resources & Sustainable Development and International Affairs from UN-affiliated University for Peace in Costa Rica and American University in Washington, DC. Sarah wrote her MA thesis on Nile Basin Governance and studied Middle East history, politics, and conflict at American University in Cairo. She received her BS in Marine Biology from the University of California in Santa Cruz.

## AGAZIT ABATE – program manager



Agazit's interests revolve around food sovereignty, food cultures, cultural production and human-scale development. She has worked on projects that highlight storytelling and community-led development in Africa and its diaspora. Agazit received her BA in International Development and MA in African Studies from the University of California Los Angeles where she wrote on African cinema, cultural production, alternative and community interpretations of development, and narratives of resistance.

## LAURA MAPSTONE-SCOTT – program coordinator



Laura graduated from McGill University with degrees in Political Science and International Development. She served as a community organizer and human rights monitor in the West Bank. With The Israel and Palestine Center for Research and Information, she facilitated bi-national development conferences highlighting the environmental benefits of cooperation in transboundary water conflicts. She has also reported arts and policy events for the Asia Society.

## FADI BESSADA – regional manager



Fadi is an archeologist and professional translator. He has specialized in conceiving and conducting cultural projects in France and Egypt in the fields of History, Archaeology, museography and linguistics.

# NILE PROJECT TIMELINE

2011

AUGUST

**THE NILE PROJECT IS BORN**  
mina girgis suggests the nile project to meklit hadero.

2012

MAY

**SCOUT TRIP**  
5-week trip to egypt, ethiopia, uganda, kenya and tanzania

2013

JANUARY

**NILE GATHERING 1**  
first nile gathering taking place in aswan, egypt, and combining a four-day workshop and a two-week music residency.

SEPTEMBER

**NILE PROJECT ALBUM 1: ASWAN**  
first recording by nile project was commissioned by Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts for Target Free Thursdays at the David Rubenstein Gallery

NOVEMBER

**NILE PROJECT ROADSHOW - EGYPT**  
touring cairo, alexandria, minya, assiut, and aswan to show films from scout trip & first nile gathering.

2014

JANUARY

**NILE GATHERING 2**  
second nile gathering taking place in kampala, uganda.

FEBRUARY

**AFRICA TOUR**  
university tour comprised of performances, workshops, and nile prize info sessions.

MAY

**NILE PROJECT ALBUM 2: JINJA**  
second recording by nile project collective musicians.

JUNE

**EUROPE TOUR**  
concert tour in europe.

SEPTEMBER

**NILE CURRICULUM**  
STEM curriculum exploring the history, geography, cultures, and ecosystems of the nile basin.

DECEMBER

**NILE PRIZE GATHERING 1**  
gathering of nile prize student finalists and award ceremony in kampala.

2015

JANUARY

**NORTH AMERICA UNIVERSITY TOUR**  
5 month residency tour to north american universities.

APRIL

**NILE GATHERING 3**  
third nile gathering taking place in brattelboro, vermont.

OCTOBER

**NILE TOUR**  
sailing up the nile from the mediterranean to aswan on a boat made of water bottles. daily performances and workshops with local communities.

DECEMBER

**NILE PRIZE GATHERING 2**  
gathering of nile prize student finalists and award ceremony in aswan.

2016

JUNE

**SMITHSONIAN NILE FESTIVAL**  
two-week festival on the us national mall - to be programmed in partnership with the smithsonian center for folklife and cultural heritage.

DECEMBER

**NILE TOUR FEATURE FILM**  
feature-length documentary film documenting the nile tour from inception to implementation.

Egypt • Sudan • South Sudan • Ethiopia • Eritrea • Uganda • Kenya • Tanzania • Rwanda • Burundi • Congo DR

the nile project is supported by

Wolff Olins  
PANTA RHEA  
FOUNDATION



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

