THE SECOND FILLING OF GERD COMPLETED, NEGOTIATIONS DELAY

In July, Ethiopia started phase two of the filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) after notifying Egypt and Sudan. The two countries opposed the ‘unilateral action’ citing the absence of a jointly agreed framework. The Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) has been deployed to provide security to the dam and its surroundings during the filling. On the negotiations, while Ethiopia categorically rejected the involvement of the League of Arab States in favor of the AU-led mediation effort, Saudi Arabia seems to have thrown its weight behind Egypt and Sudan. The members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) during the council’s open session on 8 July expressed support to the AU-led Mediation effort. The GERD dispute is likely to worsen with new formation of alliances.

TIGRAY CONFLICT EXPANDS, TPLF ON THE OFFENSIVE

The Conflict in the Tigray region is showing signs of expansion beyond the region. This is due to incursions by the Tigray Peoples’ Liberation Front (TPLF) into the Amhara and Afar regions - following the declaration of a unilateral ceasefire by the Ethiopian government. As of 22 July, 54,000 people have reportedly fled their homes from Afar region. TPLF’s incursions have also affected the ongoing humanitarian response to those affected by the conflict in the Tigray region. The US government and the United Nations have expressed concerns around reports of atrocities committed against the Eritrean refugees in Tigray. They called on all armed actors to stop attacks and intimidation against all refugees, asylum seekers and people displaced by the ongoing violence. They also condemned attacks against aid workers.

CONCERNS AROUND UPCOMING ELECTIONS

A number of recent developments in Kenya are causing concerns ahead of the 2022 General Elections. While the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) is facing legal hurdles, the relationship between President Uhuru Kenyatta and Deputy President William Ruto is getting sourer. The win by the United Democratic Alliance (UDA), a party associated with the Deputy President, in the Kiambaa by-elections held in July is believed to have created anxiety within the President’s Jubilee party. The latter protested the conduct of the elections to the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) with claims of misconduct and rigging.

Somalia’s Parliamentary and Presidential elections scheduled for 23 July 2021 and 10 October 2021 respectively, are facing delay with no new dates in sight. The delays are attributed to the submission of candidates’ names by the federal regions as well as the formation of local committees to cast the ballots. Concerns over the delays are compounded by threats from the Al-Shabaab that issued a warning to politicians against taking part in elections. Al-Shabaab’s threat underscores the enduring security challenges facing the country.
IMPACTS OF COVID-19 AND DROUGHTS’ POSE RISKS OF REGIONAL HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

South Sudan is among countries that are facing severe humanitarian crises globally with at least 4.5 million children in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. South Sudan continues to face bouts of conflict; recurrent extreme weather events like floods and droughts; and a deepening economic crisis that have resulted in high-level of food insecurity. Residents in the Nimule town council in Eastern Equatoria State have also raised alarm over looming starvation due to entry restrictions to Uganda. The restrictions are part Ugandan national COVID-19 prevention measures. Several Nimule residents go to Uganda’s border town of Elegu to purchase essential commodities including food items.

Kenya’s National Drought Management Authority, in its early warning report for July 2021, revealed a worsening trend of drought in eight counties namely; Kajiado, Laikipia, Lamu, Makuenei, Nyen, Samburu, Tana River and Wajir. One of the impacts of the worsening drought is severe mal-nutrition among children. According to the same report, this was attributed to a decrease in milk production and consumption as well as shortage of integrated health outreachs with essential nutrition services. The drought situation is anticipated to get worse between August and December 2021 requiring urgent mitigative action.

RISING INFLATION AND ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

Sudan’s annual inflation rate rose to 413% in June 2021 from 379% in the previous month. The cost of food items also showed a 248% increase compared to 242% in May. Meanwhile the prices of other consumer items averaged 644% which represented a 46% increase. Across states, the highest rate of increase was in Gezira State at 202% with the lowest being in South Darfur state at 1.33%. Sudan is set to receive debt relief that will reduce the country’s foreign debt from $56 to $6 billion when the IMF-monitored economic reforms come to an end within three years. This is believed to stabilize price fluctuations and inflation. By so doing, it is also expected to reduce risk of violent conflicts.

In Kenya, forex reserves showed a drop by 27 billion Kenyan Shillings after debt repayment to China for the loan used to build the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) from Nairobi to Naivasha. The reported drop based on records of the Central Bank of Kenya’s (CBK) was between July 15 and July 21 on account of a sharp increase in external debt service costs estimated at Sh39.6 billion. There is, however, no explanation given for the huge drop.

Uganda’s public debts rose by 15.1 per cent according to the Ugandan Central bank largely attributed to the disbursement of loans by multilateral and bilateral creditors. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Uganda is 12 years away from middle income status even after borrowing one billion dollars recently from the IMF. The country is likely to continue borrowing, even as it is experiencing a financing deficit of another $1 billion (about Shs 3.5 trillion) at the current exchange rate.

VIOLENCE THREATENS IMPLEMENTATION OF PEACE AGREEMENTS

International partners are raising concerns over the slow implementation of the revitalized peace agreement in South Sudan with reports of violence across the country. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) demanded an end to extrajudicial killings in South Sudan after the grisly execution of at least 42 people accused of criminal activity. In a statement, UNMISS revealed that some of those killed were executed in front of their families and others left bound to trees in a spate of gruesome lynchings. On the other hand, youth unemployment remains an important factor that poses risk to the efforts to consolidate peace in South Sudan. In July, hundreds of youths under the Manyemjji Forum marched in the streets of Torit town and picketed outside the compounds of humanitarian organizations including UNMISS. The youth issued an ultimatum for NGOs to leave the town within 72 hours starting Wednesday 07th July 2021. There are growing concerns that the surge in youth-related violence could be moving towards xenophobic attacks as the youth express frustration over not being gainfully engaged in some of the organizations operating in the country.

In Sudan, hundreds of people participated in a mass demonstration in El Fasher to condemn an attack on Sortony camp for the displaced in Kabkabiya locality of the North Darfur State. At least 17 people were killed in the attacks including children. The demonstrators held a vigil in solidarity with the displaced in Sortony camp and held banners denouncing the violent attack on the camp. Among the chanted slogans were ‘blood, peace, blood’ and ‘Sortony is bleeding’. The protesters called on the state government to urgently sort out the protection of the displaced in Sortony and other camps.