

The Financial Times
March 3, 1987

"Nile Drought Enters Seventh Lean Year"

summary

The flow of water into Lake Nasser has been below expectations since 1981, including a disastrous 1985. Reserves have been reduced to a point where water rationing "in the next year or so" is being contemplated.

The reduction in the lake's level has forced a reduction in power generated through the dam.

The dam is at its lowest level since it filled in 1978. Fish stocks are threatened.

Boutros Ghali, the Egyptian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, is quoted as saying, "The national security of Egypt is not Israel. The national security is water."

The reservoir is at 160.6 meters above sea level. A minimum of 165 meters is required to operate the power station. Last year the station produced about 20% of Egyptian electricity, at full capacity.

If there is no flood this year, it may be necessary to decrease the flow through the dam next year. Industrial and household consumption downstream is about 55.5 billion cubic meters annually; consumption has been maintained by using Lake Nasser's reserve. Egypt and the Sudan use about 84 billion cubic meters per year. The flow into the lake was about 57 billion in 1986, up from 35 billion in 1985.

Ethiopia's rains in 1986 did not fall in the Blue Nile catchment area.

A USAID official said efficiency of usage of water is about 55%, which is low. Egypt could make better use by more scientific control of its canal system.

The article conveyed an impression of a reluctance on the part of Egyptian officials to talk publicly about the problem.