

The Nile Swimmers Project: Reducing the burden of drowning on the River Nile, and building peace

Daniel Graham^{1,3} and Thomas Mecrow^{1,2}

Nile Swimmers¹, Centre for Injury Prevention and Research Bangladesh², Rescue 3 (UK)³

Background

The project was successfully run in Sudan in 2007 and 2008 by the British Council, and is now being coordinated by a collaboration between The Royal Life Saving Society Commonwealth, Rights and Humanity, and the Sudanese Sea Scouts. The project is directed by experienced lifesavers and public health advocates from the UK and Africa.

Geographical Scope & Aims of the Project

The Nile Swimmers Project is a unique and innovative program aimed at reducing rates of drowning on the River Nile and the surrounding area. The program also aims to promote peace by bringing together people from different backgrounds, often previously engaged in or affected by conflict, and providing a grass-roots voice for users of the river.

Reducing Drowning, Building Peace

Whilst there has been little research on the rate of drowning along the River Nile, drowning is frequently acknowledged by villagers who live on the banks of the river to be a common cause of death. Many people are aware of friends or family members who have drowned. The Nile Swimmers Project is run on a desert island on the Blue Nile outside the Sudanese capital Khartoum. It comprises of approximately twenty five participants from communities spread along the length of the River Nile. Each 'course' lasts for approximately three weeks.

We teach swimming and lifesaving skills, and facilitate wider discussion on innovative drowning prevention methods. We also use the leadership skills and comradeship developed by the participants to foster peace and friendship between groups previously engaged in conflict; the River Nile runs across boundaries that continue to see conflict stemming from ethnic, religious, and economic tension between tribes and political groups.

Our participants come from varying backgrounds and areas; from refugees to fishermen. However all have one thing in common, the importance of the river to their livelihoods and the common threat of drowning.

Empowerment, Scope, and Legacy

The Nile Swimmers Project is not solely a teaching project. Participants leave the courses empowered to return to their communities and engage with local leaders and community members. Our aim is to give participants the skills they need to identify and implement locally applicable drowning prevention strategies. Participants are expected to take part in the facilitation and teaching, and run their own courses for members of their communities when they return home. Trainees that show the most promise are invited to help run and evaluate future courses so that the project will become self sustaining in the coming years.

Conclusion/ Evaluation

A follow-up of participants by the British Council showed that hundreds of people have since been trained in lifesaving in rural villages throughout Sudan and Northern Uganda. The project gained significant media interest in both Africa and Europe, and we anticipate that this will grow as the project expands to include other countries. In the near future, the project will be expanded to include participants from all the countries within the River Nile basin, and will act as a grass-roots platform to feed into the Nile Basin Initiative; a high level initiative bringing together representatives from all ten Nile Basin states. This will offer an excellent opportunity for advocacy, and enable our participants to highlight the burden of drowning as a common problem between countries along the river.

Project Website: www.nileswimmers.com

Supported by

The Royal Life Saving Society Commonwealth www.rlsscommonwealth.org

Rights and Humanity www.rightsandhumanity.org

Corresponding Author

Daniel Graham

Lead Instructor

Nile Swimmers

Stabal Bach Plas Moel Y Garnedd

Llanycil

Bala Gwynedd UK LL23 7YG

Email: whiteminiman@gmail.com

Website: www.nileswimmers.com

Telephone: +44 7941038568