Chapter 23
Towards an Appropriate Development Approach for the Halayeb–Shalateen Border Region of Egypt

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Abstract Halayeb–Shalateen is a triangular region in southeast Egypt that borders Sudan. The region falls under Egyptian administration and sovereignty; however, Sudan claims the region. The territorial dispute impacted British colonization that reshaped the relationship between Egypt and Sudan during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Egypt has made several attempts to enforce its sovereignty over the border region with regional urban development. Such development sought to increase the population and transform the region from an underpopulated and underdeveloped region to a moderately populated developing area. However, various external factors and regional challenges have complicated development approaches and compromised outcomes. Analysis of the region's background, context, and development plans provide insights into methods that will determine the success of future efforts to develop the Halayeb–Shalateen region.

Keywords Border regions · Regional development · Population factor · Southeast of Egypt

23.1 Introduction

23.1.1 A Historical Border Dispute

In 2009, the General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP)[1] initiated an attempt to produce a development plan for a small settlement in the far southern area of

[1] The General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP) is an institution under the Ministry of Housing. It is responsible for strategically planning and upgrading existing Egyptian cities and settlements. It is also responsible for preparing the different regional plans in Egypt.

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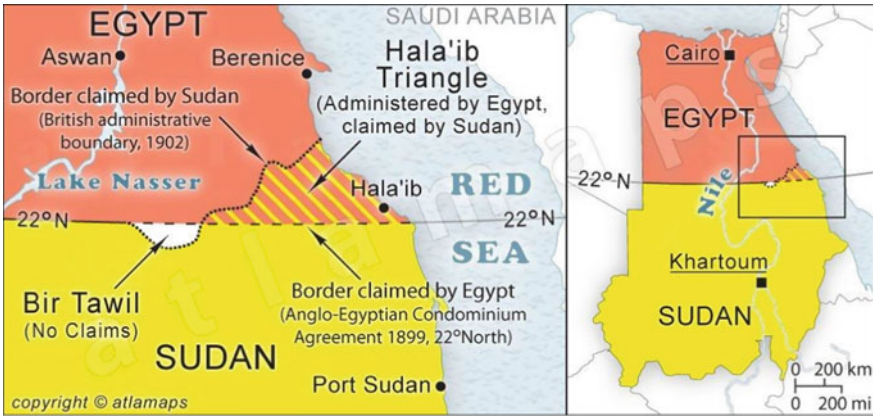

Fig. 23.1 Location of the Halayeb triangle in the border area with Sudan. *Source* globalreseach.ca

Egypt borders Sudan. The location, Ras Hederba, is a few kilometres north of the Egyptian–Sudanese border. Over the last 60 years, the Sudanese government has claimed Halayeb and Shalaeteen, known as the Halayeb triangle, despite Egypt's sovereignty over the region. This dispute can be traced to colonial times when Egypt and Sudan were one region under British colonial rule and one country in the mid-nineteenth century. Following the British colonisation of Egypt in 1882, Britain and Egypt jointly reconquered Sudan in 1899 and set the border between the two countries as the 22° parallel. Britain made further border changes in 1902 transferring the Halayeb triangle to the Egyptian administration (Briney 2017) (Fig. 23.1).

During independence movements in the first half of the twentieth century, border conflicts between the two countries were resolved except for the Halayeb triangle, which continued to cause tension until the 1990s (Serag 2010). In 1998, Egypt and Sudan agreed to a compromise over the Halayeb triangle. In January 2000, Sudan withdrew its presence from the region and ceded control to Egypt. However, during the early 2000s, the president of Sudan renewed claims for control over the Halayeb triangle (Briney 2017). This caused Egyptian authorities to consider urban development in the small settlement of Ras Hederba, which lies close to the border with Sudan; their goal was to ensure a tangible Egyptian presence in the region. This initiative was soon expanded into a full-scale regional development effort.

23.2 Research Aim and Methodology

Regional development approaches proposed in the Halayeb triangle occurred against different political, demographic, and economic challenges. One set of proposals made by a planning team formed by the GOPP in 2009 was to be selected by the authorities for implementation. However, due to the state of instability in the Middle

East, following the Arab Spring of 2011, the region's development decisions were stalled. However, in more recent years, the intention of developing this region was renewed.

Research employed case study-oriented examination and analysis of project documents, and the more recent National Strategic Plan for Urban Development to determine the feasibility of the current official approach. Discussions with the head of the 2009 planning team[2] provided an understanding of planning processes. Furthermore, conversations with a former upper-tier official from the Ministry of Agriculture[3] provided insights into the Ministry's considerations towards agricultural development in the region. In addition, the author was a member of the regional planning consultancy. These provide multiple relevant perspectives on the issues surrounding development.

23.3 A Rushed Intervention

The initial idea of the GOPP was to replan the small settlement of Ras Hederba, which was initially constructed in 1998 to attract further population and help settle the nomadic people in the area. This project was intended to stimulate a demographic footprint and further establish Egypt's sovereignty in the region. However, the renewed claims of Sudan increased pressure to deliver a planning product (Fig. 23.2).

The settlement and the surrounding area were severely underpopulated, with fewer than 500 inhabitants (GOPP 2011). Initially, the planning team rushed to produce several alternate plans to develop the settlement including the nomadic population and people from other locations in Egypt. However, the existing activities in the area were limited in magnitude and diversity, which limited the potential to attract more people to the area (GOPP 2011).

Due to these conditions, the planning team suggested that the GOPP takes the planning initiative to the regional level. They argued that a tangible change in the region's demographic settings required a comprehensive regional development perspective. Such a plan would introduce new economic activities and job opportunities and make better use of available natural resources. In addition, this plan had a greater likelihood of stimulating population growth in the region by drawing on internal migration driven by job seekers. The GOPP approved the plan at the end of 2009, and the comprehensive regional planning process was underway.

[2] The former head of the planning team is Prof. Dr. Shafak El Wakil, emeritus professor of urban and regional planning—Ain Shams University.

[3] The former official is Dr. AbdelRahman AbdelMaguid, former deputy Minister of the Ministry of Agriculture.

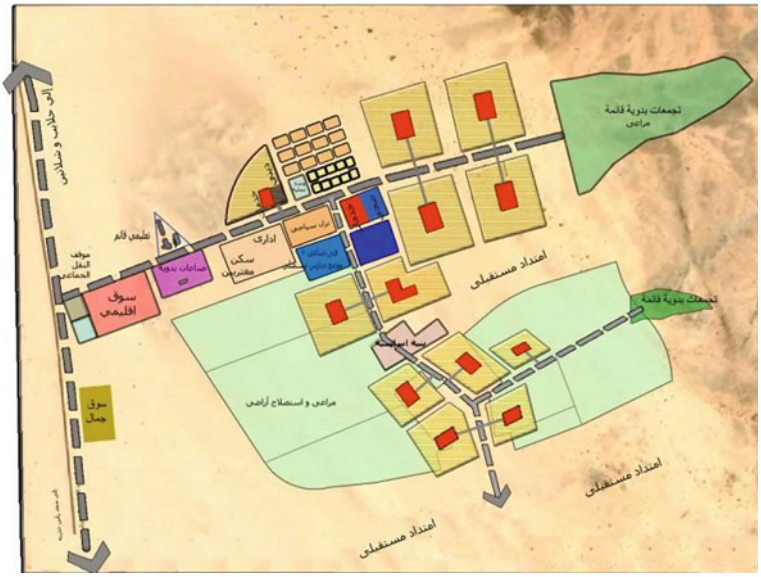

Fig. 23.2 Initial structural plan for the village of Ras Hederba. *Source* Serag (2010)

23.4 The Working Team

The GOPP created a planning team from the first mall settlement phase. The team was headed by a senior urban and regional planning consultant assisted by a regional planning expert. Consultants included urban and regional planning specialists, demographics and social studies, economic studies, geological studies, remote sensing, road networks, renewable energy and power supply, and water resources. In addition, the team was supported by a working group in the field that provided field surveys and infield data gathering in the initial stages of the work. Several characteristics of the Halayeb triangle challenged previous development attempts. While some of these factors were already understood and others anticipated based on previous efforts, many were unknown.

23.5 The Political Dispute and Economic Activities

Disputed sovereignty over the region became critical in the 1990s when Sudan attempted to extract crude oil from the region (Briney 2017). Egypt stopped the initiative, which exacerbated the tension between the two countries. Since the 1990s, no further attempts have been made to utilise any natural resources in the region. Illegal smuggling and human trafficking are common along the border, mainly since the region serves as a transitional zone for people seeking to migrate to Europe from

Sudan and other regions in Africa (Serag 2010). In addition, there are few basic and traditional activities. For example, the nomadic endogenous population raise sheep and engage in cross-border camel trading; the long shorelines of the Red Sea support fishing and boat repair (GOPP 2011). Due to these factors, attempts to expand existing activities or introduce new ones have been limited.

23.6 Socio-cultural Issues

A variety of socio-cultural factors characterise the region (GOPP 2011). One characteristic is underpopulation. The entire region of approximately 20,000 km^2 has an estimated population of fewer than 20,000 people. Most of the population in the region is nomadic or of nomadic background. There are three main tribes: the Ababda, the Basharia, and the Rashaida, and they share a distinct language, *Bega*.

To many, the concept of national citizenship is unclear, so the concept of an international border is irrelevant to them, and people move freely. Because citizenship is not well developed, loyalty is usually given to the side that provides more assistance and services. Although the Egyptian government assisted in the late 1990s (Abdel Hakim 1998), the quality and quantity of the provided services were questionable.

The nomadic background is reflected in many aspects of the culture and lifestyle, which has impacted urban development considerations in many ways. Attempts to introduce modern housing have been unsuccessful because they did not consider traditional patterns and beliefs. For example, the nomadic population avoids living in houses where the toilet is part of the house; they consider the toilet where the devil is and prefer it to be separate. As a result, nomadic populations eschew modern homes for traditional houses with fenced areas for livestock (Fig. 23.3).

23.7 Human Settlements, Infrastructure and Services

There are fewer than 20 settlements in the region; the two largest cities, Halayeb and Shalateen, are separated by 180 km. The closest airport is 290 km from Shalateen, and there is no inter-regional public transportation.

The settlements are all located near the coast and are mainly connected by the regional road. Services provided to these settlements are insufficient in quality and adequacy, especially health care and educational services. In addition, there are stark shortages in water supply, power and sewage networks (GOPP 2011). Ras Hederba, located only 7 km from the border, is an example. Electricity is only available for eight hours daily. Freshwater in tanks is brought in by truck every four days; otherwise, water is obtained from local wells.

Fig. 23.3 Water is brought in tanks four times per week to Ras Hederba. *Source* GOPP (2011)

23.8 Natural Resources

Planning teams conducted an extensive study to identify available resources that can be utilised to initiate economic activities that can develop the region (GOPP 2011):

- Minerals include crude oil, iron, and possible radioactive substances, such as uranium and black sand, which can contain rare earth elements.
- Natural attractions such as the long natural shoreline with coral reefs exist along the Red Sea; other natural areas in the region, such as Elba Mountain and the Valley of the Camels, are scenic natural sites.
- The fishing industry, although nascent, exists along the Red Sea and provides access to significant quantities and varieties of fish; it has the potential to contribute to the region's food security.
- Solar energy is plentiful—the region has approximately 90% sunshine annually—and there is potential for wind energy in certain areas.
- Agriculture, although limited, is potentially feasible; according to the former official of the Ministry of Agriculture, the most reasonable way of supporting agriculture in the region would be through water harvesting, collecting runoff water instead of using it in other applications.[4]

Water resources pose the main challenge. According to the estimates of the remote sensing consultants,[5] underground water resources are estimated to be sufficient for

[4] This definition is illustrated by the FAO, http://www.fao.org/docrep/u3160e/u3160e03.htm, last accessed July 2018.

[5] Among them is Professor Farouk El Baz, an Egyptian-American space scientist and consultant known for his work with NASA and in remote sensing earth monitoring.

only sustaining the living needs of the population; there is limited potential for use in land reclamation and agricultural activities.

Based on these resources, the planning process relied on the concept of sieve mapping, which was carried out by the planning team.

23.9 The Planning Process

One of the planning team's problems was the scarcity of accurate and current maps. Apart from satellite images that were primarily available through sources such as google.com and the data provided by the field team, no proper survey maps were available. However, the planning teams could access survey maps of North Africa and the Middle East through online archives of the University of Texas. Made almost five decades earlier by the United States Army Corps of Engineers in 1956 and 1964, they showed the locations of the existing settlements, roads, and pathways of that period.

The urban and regional planning consultants worked on a long process of updating and justifying the old maps with satellite images. Their goals were to validate the presence of the settlements shown in the old maps, categorise the inhabited and the deserted settlements at the time of the 2009–2010 project, and validate and categorise the roads and desert pathways indicated on the old maps (Fig. 23.4).

Fig. 23.4 Existing settlements in the region as justified by the planning team on old maps. The blue circles show the three main settlements Shalateen to the north and Abu Ramad and Halayeb to the south. The red circles show smaller or former settlements, while the triangles show border locations. *Source* GOPP (2011)

23.10 Setting Guidelines

Based on the situation studies, the consultants established guidelines to be followed during the preparation of the development perspective for the region:

1. Use identified locations of former and present human settlements connected by the different roads and desert pathways as crucial points—The fact that these locations survived during caravans supported their continued use subject to the availability of water sources, natural resources, and development assets.
2. Develop settlements close to international borders to include activities related to cross-border trade with Sudan—Such elements will transition tense cross-border relationships towards a more cooperative relationship, strengthen national security related to previous political disputes and ensure sovereignty.[6]
3. Increase reliance upon renewable energy resources such as solar and wind power—In several areas of the region, the consultants found a lack of connectivity. As a result, renewable energy sources were proposed to accelerate development.
4. Expand water desalination to supplement groundwater sources and overcome water supply shortages—The locations of natural groundwater wells were identified; in most cases, they were close to deserted and inhabited settlements. The potential to rely on water from ground sources was subject to supply and quality.

Due to the limited water supply, there was little scope for increasing agricultural activity; the potential to meet local populations' needs further limited agriculture's feasibility.

23.11 The Development Perspective

Based on these considerations, the planning team developed a regional development vision. It considered the available assets and resources in the region and identified the possible locations to establish or develop human settlements.

This perspective was formulated to include two main growth poles in the region, Shalateen in the north and Halayeb in the south, with a coastal zone in between them to act as a development axis. The activities along this axis would mainly be related to tourism, services, and marine transportation across the Red Sea. The idea was to replicate, in a measured way, the coastal tourism development of the 1980s and 1990s in key locations within the coastal areas of the Red Sea, such as Mersa Alam (Fakhry 2018). In addition, this plan could realise that proper connectivity and accessibility to the region could be achieved by increasing maritime transportation and constructing an airport to serve the region.

[6] This was considered in light of successful cross-border cooperation of inter-European networks that improved relationships in Europe compared to traditional nation-states (Bellini and Hilpert 2013).

Smaller development areas were introduced based on existing resources in more remote areas of the region. For example, some areas would have small industrial sites based on available mineral resources; others would be based on safari and desert tourism, and a few would rely on agriculture. In all cases, choices ensured that these locations were accessible by existing roads or roads to be developed based on desert routes identified earlier by the planning team.

Finally, developing and constructing five border settlements were suggested; these would have included international trade markets to regulate the international trade coming from Sudan and better define border areas.This would reduce the chances of future disputes (GOPP 2011).

Economic studies can develop certain activities and industries based on available assets. Therefore, the number of job opportunities that could be generated was calculated. Based on the current population, 61,000 job opportunities would be created within 17 years *ibid* (Fig. 23.5).

However, the population was insufficient to establish an Egyptian presence in the region. As a result, consultants were requested to introduce an element to boost the region's pace and realise a significant population presence.

Fig. 23.5 Regional development plan relied on a coastal tourism area combined with maritime transportation and fishing. This introduced industrial and agricultural development projects according to the location and magnitude of the natural and water resources in the region and safari-based tourism. *Source* GOPP (2011)

23.12 A Theme Park in the South

A suggestion was made to the planning consultants to incorporate a theme park similar to the Walt Disney Company's US and international properties. The reasoning was that a well-known theme park would serve as a flagship in the region and attract tourists from Africa and the Middle East while creating job opportunities. In addition, the rationale continued that a theme park would stimulate spin-off tourism-related projects such as accommodations and services and attract more job seekers to the region.

The consultancy team developed two alternatives based on this suggestion that included a theme park as the main flagship project; one was a critical coastal development, and the other alternative was an inland project in the interior of the Halayeb triangle. The two new alternates did not rule out suggestions made by the first; instead, they retained them as secondary elements in the development plan. Although the specific calculation of the estimated job opportunities to be created based on the theme park concepts and the estimated population were not calculated accurately, they aimed to attract a quarter of a million inhabitants to the region.

23.13 A Frog Leap in Development or an Unrealistic Demand?

Even though these two extra alternates were included in the final report of the regional development vision, it was questioned whether they were viable (Fig. 23.6).

Perhaps, the notion of making such a project in this remote and peripheral area was influenced by other successful cases of constructing theme parks, such as Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. The development of the Disney theme park led to the transformation of Orlando from a so-called citrus city in which economic

Fig. 23.6 Two regional development proposals for the region after introducing a theme park project to act as the flagship project and the central growth pole in the region. This was to be combined with other economic bases with different growth poles along the coastline. *Source* GOPP (2011)

activities were based on services and agriculture towards a tourist-oriented path-dependent economy that generated 66,000 job opportunities related to the tourism sector (Foglesong 2003).

The main issue that would face initiating such a project was the political instability of the region and the country. The region was subject to a protracted border dispute and political instability, such as the period that followed the January 2011 revolution and continued until 2015. Therefore, the success of starting such a project with an international partner or investor would have been very questionable in 2011. Moreover, the international hesitance to invest in Egypt has continued until recently (Macropolis.net 2014).

In addition, national investment in such a project was unlikely due to the stark economic crises in Egypt and the demand for other priority projects. Therefore, further feasibility and investment studies would have been necessary to consider the option. Even if carried out, it was anticipated that the required numbers of visitors and workers would have been insufficient.

The first proposal for regional development was based on multiple economic models, mainly coastal tourism. This approach was applied previously in different regions in Egypt. However, Egypt's tourism sector was fragile and would be impacted if any violent incident occurred. Moreover, the tourism industry almost halted following the 2011 and 2013 revolutions (Egyptian Streets 2018). Therefore, the planning team attempted to introduce other economic bases, industries, and services to avoid relying entirely on such a fragile sector.

The work on the project was suspended in May 2011 after submitting the final report for the regional development vision. It remained stagnant for almost three years before it was reconsidered in 2014, following the second revolution in June 2013.

23.14 An Overambitious Vision?

In early 2014 the National Strategic Plan for Urban Development was announced by the GOPP. The plan illustrated how different regions in Egypt would be developed over the next 40 years and then 100 years. It showed how the expected population of Egypt, forecasted to reach 152 million inhabitants in 40 years, would be distributed over different regions based on the job opportunities generated by proposed economic bases. For example, the population predicted to inhabit the Halayeb triangle region would reach three million inhabitants who would rely on nearly one million job opportunities (GOPP 1985).

The document included activities similar to the first proposal introduced by the planning consultants. However, there was a striking difference between the estimated 61,000 inhabitants forecast by the planning team and the one million inhabitants proposed in the GOPP's 2014 document (Fig. 23.7).

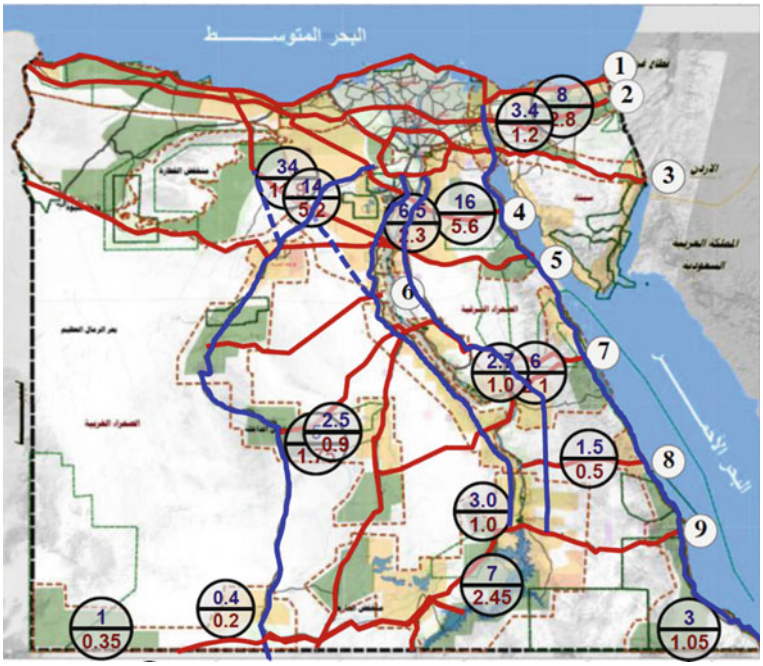

Fig. 23.7 National Strategic Plan for Urban Development released in 2014 shows the intended population distribution in 2052 vis-a-vis the expected job opportunities to be created. *Source* GOPP (2014)

23.15 Similar Past Development Attempts Were not Successful

Comparison of the intended population under the regional development initiative against the earlier cases of regional development in Egypt during the second half of the twentieth century shows that most attempts to redistribute the population to increase residents in specific locations had failed. An example is the regional development plan set for the Sinai Peninsula in the 1980s and 1990s that sought to increase the population to three million by 2000 (Dames and Moore 1985). This expectation was never realised; the current Sinai population is less than 600,000 inhabitants (CAPMAS 2018). Several attempts to develop the Western Desert of Egypt (The New Valley region) began in the 1960s. This region, approximately one-third of the total land area of Egypt, only reached a total of 250,000 inhabitants, far short of the one million population goal (CAPMAS 2018).

These efforts demonstrate that increasing the population in the region from under 30,000 inhabitants to three million inhabitants was not realistic for various reasons. Among the most critical was the lack of water resources in the region. Therefore, any increase in population would require the issue of water shortage first to be resolved.

23.16 The New Administrative Capital and Other Cities Under Construction

The government plans to build a new administrative capital east of the Greater Cairo Region (GCR) to host five million inhabitants (http://thecapitalcairo.com/ 2016). At the same time, the government's first phase of the new Alamin city is underway. This city is predicted to be home to at least three million inhabitants (Hassan 2017). The government's ability to realise these contrasts with development attempts to increase the population in the Halayeb triangle and invite comparison.

However, there are many significant differences between the new administrative capital and the new Alamin city and efforts to develop the Halayeb triangle. The new administrative capital case is adjacent to the GCR and can draw on its population and significant infrastructure to accelerate development. On the other hand, the new Alamain city is located in a region with substantial infrastructure networks and economic bases that could be utilised. Nevertheless, both cases are still being developed, and their outcomes are unknown.

23.17 Recommendations for Developing the Region

In recent months, the government has constructed projects in the region. For example, two fishing ports were finalised in the region and a desalination plant from seawater (Egypt Independent 2018). Although these small projects and initiatives will help develop the region, further steps are needed to ensure tangible results for development. In addition, political disputes are ongoing. Despite an earlier agreement between Egypt and Sudan that the region belongs to Egypt, a renewed claim and complaint was made by Sudan in 2018 to the United Nations. Due to these factors that increased the border political dispute to post-2011 levels, there is a renewed urge to develop the region (Azikiwe 2018).

Efforts to ensure a tangible Egyptian presence in the Halayeb triangle through development will require consideration of natural resources and other context issues to be successful. Therefore, strategic actions can be prioritised in the following ways:

- Establish border settlements as centres for international trade—Border settlements could benefit both sides by building on the existing trade and promoting the area as a cooperative region rather than a place of dispute.
- Address the water supply issue—Without needed water, the region's capacity will remain limited, and it will not sustain an increase in population. Various reliable water sources that can sustain industries, including agriculture and the associated populations, should be considered and implemented.
- Provide sufficient quality services—An increase in population will require good quality services, ensuring their sense of citizenship.
- Supply sufficient and appropriate resources—Specific resources will be required for different economic activities necessary to increase regional development.

Farmers from other regions with experience should be attracted if agriculture is introduced.

- Establish connectivity and accessibility—An airport to serve the region and roads with adequate transportation modes are required. At the same time, maritime transportation of goods and people to the rest of Egypt can be achieved by constructing more seaports. Marine transportation can also serve tourism with neighbouring countries such as Saudi Arabia, whose ports are four hours across the Red Sea.
- Focus development—The development of several key locations will ensure that reasonable growth poles that can have spin-off effects in the future are successfully established.

Discussion with the head of the former planning team, she explained her views of the 2014 plan and proposals made from 2009–2011. The 2014 development plan for an increase in population to three million inhabitants was overambitious. However, the 2009–2011 development plan was more feasible. A mega project would be adequate to accelerate development rather than serve as the main economic base; dependency on a single sector would jeopardise the regional economy and lead to collapse if the mega project failed.

The development of the Halayeb triangle is of socio-economic and political importance to Egypt. However, it cannot be achieved with current natural resources. As a result, the triangle has overlooked the potentialities of cross-border cooperation, which can achieve mutual benefits for both sides and move beyond the current border tensions to a state of full-scale border cooperation.

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