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Water, vital for life and sustainable growth in Sudan

Sudan – Water is central to a growing nation. Depending on its scarcity, it can help or hamper sustainable development. In Sudan, a country that is half desert or semi-desert, the issue of freshwater availability is critical. Much of Sudan's population suffers from a shortage of both clean water for drinking and reliable water for agriculture.

Yet Sudan has substantial water resources, although with a very broad disparity in availability at the regional level, as well as major fluctuations within and between years. These imbalances are a source of hardship in the drier regions, as well as a driving force for resource-based conflict. Equitable use of water resources and the sharing of benefits are therefore key for Sudan's sustainable development and to minimize the risk of conflict.

Simultaneously, Sudan, similar to many developing countries, is facing multiple processes of change: climatic changes, population growth, urbanization, challenges as a result of conflict and fluctuations in the economy. Over the last 15 years, Sudan's economy shifted from being primarily agrarian towards non-renewable resource extraction, such as oil and gas. However, after the South's separation in 2011, Sudan's strategic outlook again returned to agriculture as the main economic driver.

Water is needed as a platform for growth now and in the future in Sudan. But for this to happen, water needs to be managed sustainably. Managing it well has the potential to enhance livelihoods, reduce conflict and transcend traditional divides between conservation, development and humanitarian action. Genuine sustainability also implies social equity, contributing to the prospects of peace as well as economic growth. But the relationship is not always linear – i.e. more water, better environment for sustainable growth.

In areas where nomads are following little and inconsistent rains, providing a reliable water supply for livestock may be the biggest challenge. Yet, in these cases, provision of a permanent water source may mean that livestock populations increase and remain longer into the dry season than the rangeland can support. This can cause degradation of the rangeland itself.

Attempting to tackle some of these challenges, UN Environment's water programme in Sudan has been steadily growing. Able to respond with a livelihood and natural resource perspective, UN Environment uses hybrid approaches that have sustainable growth as the main criterion.

Initiatives such as the Wadi El Ku Catchment Management project in North Darfur¹ have already benefitted thousands of households with new water channels, gully stabilization, and water harvesting dams. The project aims to strengthen livelihoods and contribute to peace through the integrated and sustainable management of water and other natural resources.

¹ **Water in Wadi El Ku:** The Wadi El Ku Catchment Management Project (WEK) is a European Union funded pilot project being implemented by UN Environment, working closely with civil society and government partners. The project is located in a 50km stretch of the Wadi El Ku catchment in North Darfur and aims to show how effective and inclusive natural resource management can significantly improve livelihoods, enabling sustainable increases in agriculture and related economic benefits in Sudan. The project is achieving this through the creation of multi-stakeholder platforms for decision-making, combined with Integrated Water Resource Management and Community-based Natural Resource Management principles.

Furthermore, this and other UN Environment projects can show that long-term institutional arrangements at the community level ensure that there are platforms for dialogue, which are needed to mitigate against potential conflicts² arising from competition where this resource is scarce.

² **Water in West Darfur and West Kordofan:** In order to help mitigate conflicts arising from competition over scarce water resources, UN Environment is implementing a 3-year project funded by the EU in Central and West Darfur and West Kordofan. The project aims to improve access to and management of essential water resources and related services and improve the capacities at local and state level to resolve conflict over water resources. Working with our partners, the Darfur Development and Reconstruction Agency and SOS Sahel Sudan, the project will provide a combination of natural resource management and livelihoods interventions, as well as build on existing conflict management structures through coordination, trainings and establishing platforms for dialogue amongst communities and local and state institutions. By directly addressing grievances through dialogue, discussion and agreed dispute resolution processes – ensuring the involvement of youth, women and external stakeholders – the potential for violent conflict over water resources can be minimized.

Additional approaches taken by UN Environment include building the prerequisite competence in government and civil society institutions, and supporting the development of adequate environmental policies and institutional arrangements, informed by science and monitoring data³.

³ **Water in East Darfur:** UN Environment's Natural Resource Management for Sustainable Livelihoods project will work towards improved livelihoods and poverty alleviation of conflict-affected communities in East Darfur, Sudan. It will do so together with UNOPS by helping ensure that environmental resources, such as water, are more accessible, sustainable and effectively used. The project will pursue this through the construction of water sources to help safeguard environmentally sound and conflict-free water supply. These water points are to be co-managed by the communities and relevant institutions through a collectively agreed upon arrangement. These water points will further be used to support the demonstration of techniques contributing to more sustainable and productive use of natural resources. In parallel, UN Environment will work on strengthening institutional capacity, supporting policy development rooted in science, and monitoring and evaluation.

UN Environment has cemented relationships with government at various levels throughout Sudan, as well as non-governmental organizations and other members of the UN family.

Indeed UN Environment's success can be attributed to these partnerships, allowing the organization to advocate for good water management within development and humanitarian sectors through demonstration projects, advocacy, technical support and capacity building.

Looking to the future, UN Environment's initiatives related to water resources in Sudan have shown the huge potential for similar work both inside the country and beyond. Many lessons can be drawn from these successful projects, which have produced impressive results despite operating a highly challenging context. World Water Week provides an opportunity

This article was written by Dr. Eiman Karar, a water resource specialist with UN Environment in Khartoum, on the occasion of World Water Week 2016.

More information:

UN Environment's ['Post Conflict Environment Assessment'](#) of Sudan was published in 2007 and led to the establishment of a UN Environment office in Khartoum.

UN Environment's team in Sudan were joint-winners of the 2016 'Outstanding Team' Baobab Award, recognizing their great success and innovation over nearly ten years in a country divided by conflict.

Further information about UN Environment's programme in Sudan can be found at www.unep.org/Sudan and regular updates about activities on the ground can be found on our Facebook page www.facebook.com/UNEPSudan.

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