

# **“Hunting for Moisture”**

**Project Update for  
Trade plus Aid Charitable Trust**



**July 2004**

## **Introduction**

ITDG is an international, non-governmental organisation and has been working for nearly 40 years for the development, promotion and dissemination of appropriate technologies aiming to eradicate poverty from developing countries. ITDG Sudan has been working in North Darfur since 1988. The principle aim of their work is to break the 'relief cycle', in which poor people's circumstances are so difficult that they go from one crisis to another, without having the means to become self sufficient.

Through ITDG's participatory methods, working with local groups of farmers, villagers and artisans, ITDG has helped to develop a range of simple technologies that have improved people's lives.

Western Sudan is being torn apart by a yearlong conflict that has escalated from tribal fighting to become an international humanitarian disaster. Over one million people are already displaced and it is estimated that up to thirty thousand have been killed. Now the whole area is facing a man made famine that could threaten the lives of thousands more.

In North Darfur alone there are around forty thousand displaced people and it is one of the poorest states in Sudan. North Darfur also offers extremely difficult conditions for growing food and raising livestock – 90 per cent of the population live below the poverty line and 60% of the state's 1.4 million-strong population are constantly faced with very real doubts about whether the rains will come and if they will have enough food to survive on each year.

## **The Project**

ITDG Sudan worked very closely with the local communities of two villages in North Darfur, Abu Degaise and Gharny, to implement the project "Hunting for Moisture". The objective of the project was to help to improve the lives of the local people by ensuring that they were able to produce more stable crops. This would in turn help in securing household food and also provide a surplus for income generation.

The people who live in these villages have done so for many generations. Many of them have never been to another village yet alone the capital state, El-Fashir, which is only 20km away. For these communities, choices are minimal; either they stay and persevere or they leave and migrate to El-Fashir or the capital of Sudan, Khartoum. In most instances, it is the men who leave with the promise of returning to their village wealthy, but they never do.

The villages of Abu Degaise and Gharny have recently been affected by the ongoing conflict in North Darfur and they are experiencing the continual influx of Internally Displaced People from other villages on their way to the capital El-Fashir. These people and families, some of which come with livestock, place an additional pressure for what water there is.

When the local community found out that ITDG would be working with them morale was boosted significantly. The local people who had previously thought about leaving changed their minds and decided to stay. They worked hard with their families to implement key activities within the project.

## Activities Undertaken

To achieve the overall objective of the project a number of key activities have taken place.

### Community Mobilisation

Key people from both villages were brought together and a village development committee was formed. Their aim was to work as a close partner to ITDG Sudan and other organisations on issues that affect their village. After receiving support and training on how to identify village requirements, one of the first outputs from the village development committee was the formation of a management committee. This was responsible for planning, implementation and management of the agreed development activities in the area.

The village development committee and the management committee devised a strategy for the development of the villages and agreed that the management committee should receive training on administration techniques and bookkeeping.

They also carried out an overall assessment of the two villages and a list of needs was produced and prioritised. The main points raised were: -

- The overall lack of water
- The need for improved seeds and seed storage
- The need for hand tools for farming
- The need for animal drawn ploughs

To ensure that there was agreement and buy-in to key issues being discussed, a participatory and inclusive way of working was adopted. This proved vital to the success of the project.



*The Women and men met at the same time but separately, to discuss who should be put forward as members of the action team responsible for the construction of the Hafir.*

To help achieve these priorities a number of action teams were set up to implement the following activities: -

## **Hafir**

A Hafir is a hand-dug reservoir, which collects rainwater for domestic purposes and livestock. The Hafir is a rectangular shaped pit approximately 130 meters long by 80 meters wide and 3.5 meters deep. Water stored here can last for up to ten months if used by the population of the two villages and their livestock alone. The construction of the Hafir has been completed along with fencing to keep out animals.

Halima Adooma Edaidallah is married with five children, two girls and three boys. Halima was one of the first people to start to mobilise her family and relatives to support the community work. She was appointed as one of the members of the action team responsible for the construction of the Hafir.

“ This Hafir has played a major role to convince me to stay in the village with my children until they have finished their education” she said.



*A general view of the body of the Hafir, taken towards the end of the dry season*

## **Nursery**

North Darfur is not only affected by drought but also human over-utilisation of meagre forest resources. Trees are cut and converted into charcoal, which is the main source of energy for cooking in the area. Therefore, a nursery was constructed using local materials and 4,000 tree seedlings were planted in the nursery. The seedlings will be distributed to the farmers when they have matured and will be grown in local farms.

## **Water Dam**

The severe security situation in North Darfur had delayed the collection of vital information needed to start work on the water dam. Travel permits have now been authorised for the project staff and they have managed to collect vital data, drawing specifications, materials requirements and costing estimates. This has inevitably delayed the whole process and the water dam will not be constructed until after the rainy season.

## **Community Grain/Seed Bank**

A grain bank has been constructed which enables farmers to store their crops in a safe place. The grain / seed bank is stocked with grains immediately after harvest and they are stored until a reasonable price is offered at the market.

Plans are already in place to utilise the grain/seed bank after the next harvest.

## **Village Extension Agents**

Three people, one woman and two men, from the village were appointed and trained as village extension agents. Their role after training is to help in upgrading the skills of the farmers, which will enable them to apply up-to-date technologies and agricultural processes to day-to-day activities.

They have been trained on how to design the lay out of the terraces in the field, how to plant crops with appropriate spacing and on the precautions to take against field pests and store pests. They are also provided with agricultural hand tools and a donkey plough, which they rent out to farmers during the harvest.

The donkey plough combines three separate activities into one; ploughing, weeding and planting. This saves on time and effort mainly for women and girls who are traditionally responsible for 80 per cent of agricultural labour.

The village extension agents are now working with farmers passing on their knowledge and skills.

## **Women's Development Association**

The growth of Women's Development Associations is one of ITDG Sudan's greatest achievements. Over 13,000 women have been trained in food processing, creating business techniques and greater food security.

In Sudan, women are responsible for food making and preservation. From farming to cooking, women are working hard to secure as much food and income for their families as possible. But they are also undermined, having lower status than men. Women are expected to work at income generation and also care for the family and home. The long term fighting in Sudan has also left many women without fathers or husbands, struggling to keep their families going. The Women's Development Association is a way to help women build their knowledge and skills and gain better results from their hard work.

A Women's Development Association was set up in the villages and local women were trained in different food processing techniques, such as vegetable drying. This process entails cutting onions, okra, tomatoes and other vegetables and keeping them in clean pans under the sun for three to seven days to dry gradually under the sun heat. They are then packed in plastic bags and either stored or sold through the merchant's shop in the village, generating a small income.

## **Sudanese Red Crescent**

In collaboration with the Sudanese Red Crescent, further training was provided to the local community on food processing, literacy classes and handicraft production. They also provide seeds, hand tools and animal drawn carts to the local community.

## **Impact**

It is too early to assess or measure the overall impact of the project. The project finished in June 2004 and the rainy season starts mid July to September. We can say, however, that the foundations of this project are now in place:

- The setting up of a village development committee
- The construction of the Hafir
- The setting up of the Nursery
- The construction of the community seed bank
- The training of village extension agents
- Working partnership's with the Women's Development Agency and the Sudanese Red Crescent

We can expect to see more tangible outputs from the project at the beginning of the New Year. This can be measured by the amount of crop harvested and the amount of water in the Hafir in addition to the money farmers make after selling harvested crops.

## **Summary**

Despite the ongoing conflict in the area a number of significant activities have taken place, this was due to the resilience of the local people and the ongoing commitment of ITDG.

All the project awaits now is the completion of the water dam, which will start after the rainy season. Other than this set back, the project has been successfully completed. Tangible benefits will begin to be seen from the beginning of 2005.

## **Thank You**

We are very grateful to Trade plus Aid Charitable Trust for its most generous contribution. Most particularly, ITDG Sudan has also asked that we pass on special thanks on behalf of the people from the two villages, Abu Degaise and Gharny.