

INTRODUCTION

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the BOARD CHAIR

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the PRESIDENT

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**F**or a brief time, despair in the Abou Shouk–El Fashir refugee camp faded and life seemed almost normal for people who feel preyed upon by all sides, caught up in a cruel conflict, with forced displacement of civilians, mass killings, burned villages, abducted women, stolen cattle, rape, and other grave crimes commonplace in this war-scarred region of Sudan. So far violence, hunger and disease have claimed up to 300,000 lives, according to United Nations sources, while a further two million people have been forced from their homes.

Despite extreme risk for humanitarian personnel, Near East Foundation's Sudan administrator Mohamed Ali successfully delivered 50 sheep, purchased for the special occasion of the Eid Al-Adha celebrations, the holiest in the Islamic religious calendar. The feast commemorates Abraham's near sacrifice of his son and subsequent slaughter of a sheep instead. The Near East Foundation joined in the Eid Al-Adha celebrations with camp residents, most of whom had lost not only their homes and livelihoods, but family and friends as well.



Abou Fashir is comprised of 22 blocks with about 500 people in each; and an average of three sheep were allocated to each block and the meat shared, in keeping with the custom for this occasion. NEF was the only non-Islamic, Western agency participating in the feast with local people in Darfur. Mohamed Ali reported back:

"It was very rewarding to see the impact of these gifts on the families and in particular on the children who have suffered so much. We learned that this is the first time that such gifts have been distributed in the area, with most agencies preferring distribution in the larger towns and villages rather than the camps, which are more chaotic and less easy to deal with. Both local officials as well as camp residents welcomed the initiative of Near East Foundation and extended a heart-felt welcome to continue to work with people in the area."

Then he contributed this personal note: "I would like to say that although due to the travel I was not able to be with my own family and children during the feast, I feel privileged and glad that I was able to contribute to the happiness of so many others in this area, who have been so severely affected by recent conflicts and tribal feuds. Rest assured that however small this effort may seem in comparison to the need, we did something positive to help people and to let them know that someone cares about them and shares with them during this important holiday season." He returned in early February and distributed thousands of dollars of emergency medicines and blankets.

**P**eople appreciate help on special occasions and emergencies—and we offer such help, but what they really want and need most is the kind of long-term development assistance the Near East Foundation is all about. For it is the underlying insecurity, poverty, disease, ignorance, environmental degradation, and lack of economic opportunity, that create conditions hostile to peace and stability.

From the beginning, NEF's work in Sudan has provided funds and training to increase the skills of Sudanese, who often lack only the expertise or experience to implement the initiatives they have in mind. At the World Bank's request, NEF helped launch and coordinate the first Ethiopia-Sudan Development Marketplace, a competition showcasing innovative ideas for development and poverty reduction. NEF promoted and eased Sudanese participation in the marketplace, where 20 Sudanese organizations secured funding. With Sudan's land-based people, we have labored in fish farming, bee-keeping, rangeland rehabilitation and much more.

But deserving of particular mention, one of NEF's early publications in Arabic was an extensive case study of micro-credit in Port Sudan back in the 1980s, and that long history of providing training and capital for micro-credit continues. NEF set up two programs in the Abou Hamid area, 350 km north of the capital of Khartoum. Even for the visually impaired, a very special challenge requiring adaptation of all our materials and techniques, for an association of more than 60 young adults and heads of households. The so-called "popsicle lady" from Tyba Kababish in northern Sudan, graphically demonstrates the difference a \$200 loan can make in a human destiny.



## POPSICLE LADY

Her house is mud brick, a couple of small, spare, clean rooms with a bed of tree branches and woven support for a thin mattress. Outside, the garden space between the house and surrounding mud wall features a few flowers and some herbs and peppers planted in dirt-filled, powdered-milk cans. This starkly simple home is also her business location and makes possible the feeding, clothing, and education of the children of this widow and sole support of a large family.

The enterprise was her idea. She borrowed the equivalent of \$200 and bought a refrigerator with a freezer. Every evening she fills small plastic bags with flavored juice, and freezes them overnight. In midmorning she puts them in the orange insulated cooler atop the refrigerator, and heads off to the nearby elementary school where the children buy them as recess-time treats. The pennies add up and she makes a living by dint of her evident ingenuity, hard work, and the small loan—repaid in less than a year—and made possible through NEF's program.

NEF is now working with the International Fund for Agricultural Development to enhance Sudanese resiliency to drought, food security, and income generation in two western Sudan states. Beneficiaries are the small farmers, livestock keepers, workers and artisans, who comprise 90 percent of the rural population with average annual incomes of only \$100 to \$150. Previously NEF partnered with the Global Environmental Facility to support 20 community-based credit funds in the same area in 2001. With this new project, NEF is connecting with local groups to help establish effective credit for small enterprises and income-generating opportunities.

To make that possible, this spring NEF's Jordan staff organized a study tour for 16 Sudanese officers of the traditional, informal, village saving and credit *sanduqs*. The *sanduqs* offer the advantages of use by illiterate villagers, low cost servicing, and built in social pressure for repayment. NEF is helping to develop these *sanduqs* with organizational and management support, loan policies and procedures, and grants up to \$20,000. A 15-day workshop was held in Jordan, using participatory techniques, case studies and other methods, including field visits to two micro-financing companies and two community-based credit programs established in the south of Jordan with NEF support. Dr. Souliaman Ajeb, Director General of Sudan's Ministry of Agriculture/State of Kordofan North, accompanied the *sanduq* representatives on the study trip.

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Also NEF introduced credit facilities in New Dar El-Salaam El-Rabwa to reinforce its reproductive health program with income-generating activities that supplement family income, improve nutrition, and increase access to health services. Again, to broaden the scope of training for the community-run, micro-credit fund, NEF called upon its Jordan staff and technical specialists from NEF-Egypt.

## HEALTH CLINIC

After 30 months of very hard work to provide, affordable, quality reproductive health care to displaced Sudanese living outside the capital city of Khartoum—there is a fully operational health clinic, made possible by a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and with NEF support. It is the only health center available for the entire settlement of about 35-45,000 people fleeing Sudan's internal conflicts, drought and other difficulties.



Their health is jeopardized by both poverty and the environment in which they live. Malaria and endemic diseases rank the main causes of illness and death with high maternal and infant mortality and a fertility rate of 5.4 children per women. National family planning is estimated at only 9.9 percent because of lack of information and misconceptions about risks; and an estimated 82 percent of Sudanese women have undergone female genital mutilation. Further, reproductive health problems, sexually transmitted disease and HIV/AIDS are growing at unprecedented rates—and the Sudanese Ministry of Health has put AIDS at the top of its agenda.

By the first of the year, the NEF clinic had treated over 33,000 patients since opening in September, and nearly another 30,500 in the past six months. In addition to general health services—diagnosis, primary health care, laboratory tests and a pharmacy, the clinic emphasizes reproductive health care, including family planning, prenatal and postnatal care, attracting more than 800 patients for these new services in the past six months. In 2005 NEF was able to expand services to include labor and delivery as well as advanced laboratory work, thanks to a grant from the Population Council. This extension involves designing a health management information system and establishing a sustainable pricing model for reproductive health care in low-income areas. All clinic services are offered at nominal fees to enhance access.

Given the kinds of health problems encountered by clinic staff, there was a strong need for increased community awareness, particularly about reproductive health and sexually transmitted diseases. So NEF responded with an outreach program teaching both primary and reproductive health care. Women have been trained in nutrition and hygiene, as midwives and home visitors, benefiting nearly 4,000 families. There's even the possibility of micro-health insurance. Also, the NEF project has helped local residents to plan, manage and network within their own community, government and non-governmental organizations,

for the services they need, including a severe shortage of clean, potable water for the rapidly-growing population of the settlement and roofing and equipping the local school.

## TRIBUTES

And all that effort is very appreciated. “We used to travel a long distance to El-Hajj Youssef area just to get even the most basic medications,” said one member of her new village health committee, “We can now get them at cheaper prices at the NEF health center.” “This is my fourth pregnancy, but the first time I follow up with a doctor,” said a visitor to the Center for Pregnancy. “I used to call the midwife only when the labor pains came. Now I know how important it is to maintain a proper diet and healthy life-style during pregnancy. The friendly staff at the health center have taught us many things about having and raising health children,” she added.

On the official side, the Sudanese Ministry of Health’s North Khartoum Health Team Director summed up the prevailing opinion: “The NEF center offers high-quality services at very low-cost prices...services provided have contributed considerably to improving the health situation. Our entire team highly appreciates the valuable services NEF is offering to the Dar El-Salaam community.”

Clearly delivering sheep to Sudan to provide meat for a religious feast is just one piece in the Near East Foundation’s multi-faceted approach to bolstering human dignity. Over this year NEF continued to invest in the people of Sudan for their long-term development and well being, building a people’s sense of their possibilities and supporting their priorities.

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