



2010

United Nations Mission

In SUDAN

**Riding
high**

Published by UNMIS Public Information Office



Long way home



Hand-dug well containing dirty water near Alap village, Western Bahr El-Ghazal.

The grey and stale-looking water in an uncovered hand-dug well in a Western Bahr El-Ghazal village looked unfit for human consumption.

But until the non-governmental organization (NGO) of a former Sudanese refugee appeared on the ground, villagers were forced to drink it.

On a hot and humid April day, men of Alap village were standing next to Water for Sudan's drilling machinery, illustrated with the emblem of a blue water drop in a black hand.

The atmosphere was tense, as the first drilling of that day had failed. A young man named Salva Dut, wearing cargo pants, a

Hand-dug well with dirty water near Alap village.



long-sleeved shirt and a baseball cap was giving instructions.

"If the mud from under the ground is not coming up, the water in the borehole will never be clean enough for drinking, so we'll have to try a third spot," said Mr. Dut, Water for Sudan President and Team Operations Leader.

The NGO provided water mainly in Upper Nile and Bahr El-Ghazal states. Located 20 kilometres from Wau in Roc Roc Dong payam, Alap village, with a population of a few hundred, desperately needed a safe water source.

A slim woman of about thirty named Adut Malong Akwat said she had been walking at least two hours daily to collect water from the nearest open well since she had become an adult.

Women walked to the next village to fetch water in jerrycans, taking an hour each way in the mornings. As they carried water for large families, they usually had to repeat the trip in the evenings.

Ms. Akwat has three children, who had been sick with cholera several times. No wonder, as the wells she used contained unclean water. Cattle also drank from them and defecated nearby.

The reason Salva Dut, a former Sudanese "Lost Boy" during the country's civil war, founded Water for Sudan was also health-related. While studying in the United

States, he learned that his father, whom he had last seen 17 years before, had fallen ill from a water-borne disease and been admitted to a hospital near Rumbek.

"I knew in my heart that some day I would go back to Sudan, but I didn't know what I would do to help people," Mr. Dut told *In Sudan*. Only when his father got sick did he realize the great need for water.

Mr. Dut established his organization in 2004, beginning by fundraising in the United States and contracting a drilling company. He himself was a student of international development and lacked experience with water and sanitation projects.

Due to two decades of war, the NGO founder said, it was difficult at first to find Sudanese workers with good skills. But now he had more than 20 employees, about one-third Sudanese.

After setting up hand pumps, Water for Sudan also trained beneficiaries about their use and maintenance. The local community contributed hard labour as well as gravel and bricks for the pump platform.

Another initial hardship was that land-mined roads made many areas inaccessible. Moving equipment long distances still posed a challenge, Mr. Dut admitted, but security had been much more stable since the 2005 peace agreement.

Village chief Michael Majak Yuo acknowledged that the area had been severely hit during the civil war. Though the situation was calm now, lack of clean water



Water for Sudan

jeopardized health and education. At times young girls and children were tasked to fetch water, skipping school.

Despite constant challenges, seeing development was rewarding, Mr. Dut said. The prevalence of diseases had dropped, children were attending school and the long daily journey of women to collect water was becoming a past burden.

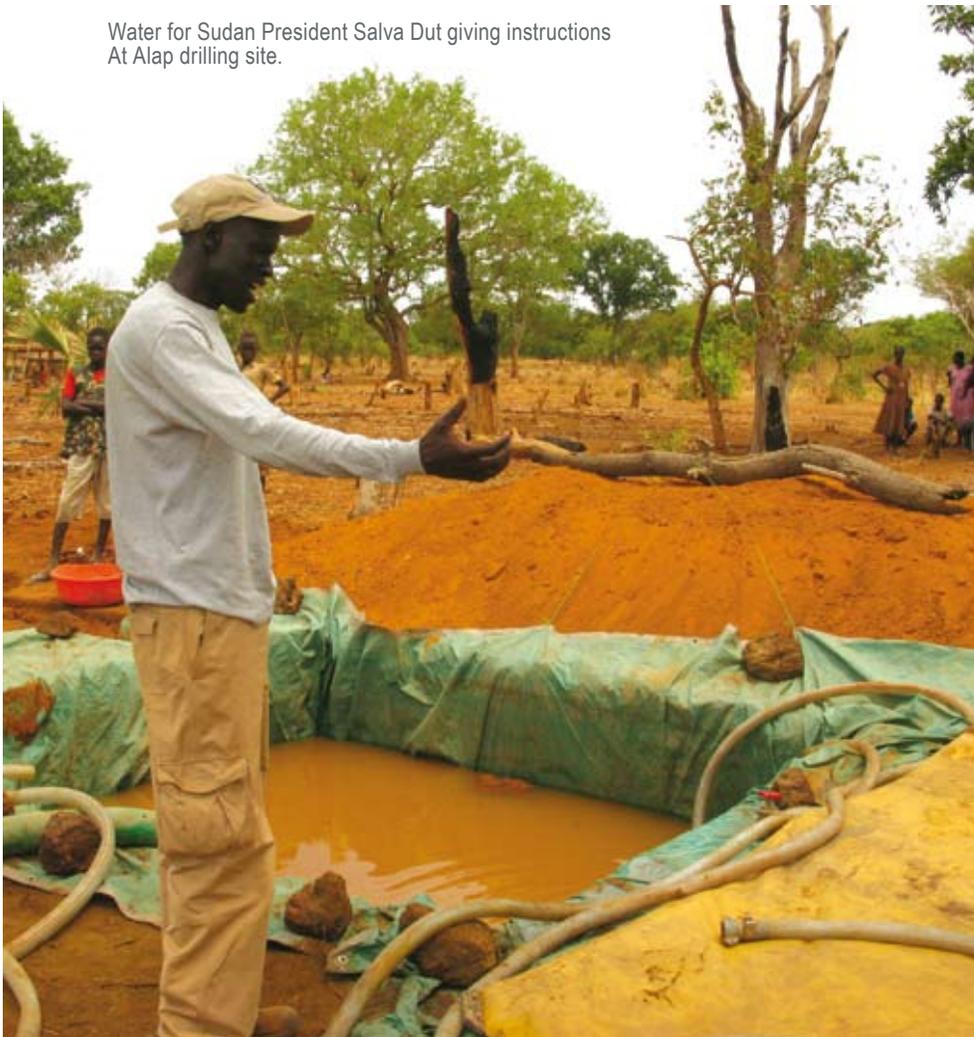
"If I didn't have to walk so far, it would improve my life," Ms. Akwat remarked as men were tirelessly working at the drilling. "I could finish all the other housework that now I don't have time for." ■

Story and photos
by Eszter Farkas



Water for Sudan staff and local residents busy drilling.

Water for Sudan President Salva Dut giving instructions
At Alap drilling site.



Lost Boy bond

Salva Dut was 11 years old when civil war came to his hometown, Lounariik, Tonj North County, Warrap State, in 1985. According to the 35-year-old man, his whole classroom ran in all possible directions when government troops attacked the village "accusing (it) of sponsoring rebels".

"The incident happened around 10 a.m. while I was in school," Mr. Dut recalled. "There was no opportunity to run back to your family."

After two months of walking initially with 25 boys, Mr. Dut arrived with about 75 Lost Boys to Itang refugee camp in Ethiopia, which he left two years later for the country's Pinyudo camp.

In 1991, due to the Ethiopian civil war, masses of Sudanese refugees fled back to Southern Sudan and then to Kakuma camp in Kenya.

As a teenager, the now lanky man with boyish features ended up leading over 1,000 displaced boys after years of walking. "When I was 11, I was leading about 30 boys, then 250 and then 1,500."

Although calm and positive, Mr. Dut remembered horrors of the war. "I swear to God ... I saw a lot of death."

They were about 12,000 when they arrived in Kakuma in 1992. About 5,000 had died since they left Ethiopia due to disease, bullets, hunger and other causes.

"There was a guy from my class, Marial, he didn't make it," Mr. Dut said. "He died but he wasn't shot. It was something else ... wildlife actually."

Mr. Dut had been displaced for over 10 years when he was finally resettled, along with about 3,800 other Lost Boys, in the United States in 1996, under the auspices of the US State Department and the United Nations.

But he still considers himself partly homeless, as he stays in the Sudanese bush for six months when drilling, and travels back to the US for the rest of the year.

Lost Boys still meant family to each other, he said, sometimes spending more time together than with their spouses.

"We've been together supporting each other ... if you get sick, no one else will help you but your comrade," Mr. Dut said. "You have all the challenges together ... that will really build a good bond. That will never go away."