Equator Initiative Case Studies
Local sustainable development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities

ZENAB FOR WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT
Sudan

Empowered lives. Resilient nations.
UNDP EQUATOR INITIATIVE CASE STUDY SERIES

Local and indigenous communities across the world are advancing innovative sustainable development solutions that work for people and for nature. Few publications or case studies tell the full story of how such initiatives evolve, the breadth of their impacts, or how they change over time. Fewer still have undertaken to tell these stories with community practitioners themselves guiding the narrative.

To mark its 10-year anniversary, the Equator Initiative aims to fill this gap. The following case study is one in a growing series that details the work of Equator Prize winners – vetted and peer-reviewed best practices in community-based environmental conservation and sustainable livelihoods. These cases are intended to inspire the policy dialogue needed to take local success to scale, to improve the global knowledge base on local environment and development solutions, and to serve as models for replication. Case studies are best viewed and understood with reference to ‘The Power of Local Action: Lessons from 10 Years of the Equator Prize’, a compendium of lessons learned and policy guidance that draws from the case material.

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Acknowledgements
The Equator Initiative acknowledges with gratitude Zenab for Women in Development, and in particular the guidance and inputs of Ms. Fatima Ahmed. All photo credits courtesy of Zenab for Women in Development. Maps courtesy of CIA World Factbook and Wikipedia.

Suggested Citation
PROJECT SUMMARY

Zenab for Women in Development mobilize and empower women, through the organization of local cooperatives into a larger union of women farmers. Established in 2005, the union has grown from 300 women in six communities to 3,000 women in 53 communities across the state of Gedaref, Sudan. The union provides a platform for women farmers to improve agricultural productivity and exchange good environmental practices. Training is provided in organic agriculture, crop rotation and the use of biological fertilizers. The organization has raised awareness of deforestation, distributed cooking gas to reduce the felling of trees for firewood, and engaged union members in reforestation and tree planting activities.

In addition to strengthening the land tenure status of women, the initiative offers extensive health education programmes which raise awareness about maternal health, family planning, HIV and AIDS prevention, and female genital mutilation. Union revenues are invested in rural primary schools, sanitation services, and fresh water access projects.

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KEY FACTS

EQUATOR PRIZE WINNER: 2012

FOUNDED: 2008

LOCATION: Gedaref, Sudan

BENEFICIARIES: Over 3,000 women in 53 rural communities

BIODIVERSITY: Sustainable agriculture, tree-planting
Gedaref, Sudan

Gedaref State, together with Kassala and Red Sea State, comprise the region of East Sudan. The state – bordered by Kassala and Khartoum State to the North, El Gezira State to the West and Sennar State to the South – has a population of approximately 1.35 million people, with an annual growth rate of 3.87 per cent. Though more than two thirds of the state’s population live in rural areas, it is well connected to regional centres of Sudan and to some Ethiopian cities via a network of highways. A number of Sudanese tribal groups are represented in Gedaref’s population, among them Shaighiyas, Beggaras, Dinkas, Furs, Nubas and Massalits. The state is also home to a large number of foreign diasporas including Kurds, Armenians, Indians, Greeks, Egyptians, Copts, Ethiopians, Eritreans, Somalis, Nigerians and Chadians. The concentration of so many ethnicities and nationalities in Gedaref can be attributed to an agricultural boom that swept the state, transforming it into a major centre of trade and attracting people from neighbouring states and countries. In the 1980s and 1990s, war and famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea flooded Gedaref with large numbers of refugees, many of whom still live in refugee camps.

Environmental decline, poverty and conflict

Agriculture is the main economic activity in Gedaref, with around 80 per cent of the state’s population engaging in agriculture as some part of their livelihoods. The agriculture industry, however, faces a number of challenges. Unsustainable harvesting techniques and agricultural practices have degraded ecosystem functions to the point that soil and water quality are, in many places, no longer sufficient to support or sustain agriculture. Overgrazing and overharvesting have resulted in the loss of vegetation which has in turn led to land degradation, transforming much of the potentially fertile land into desert. Slash-and-burn agriculture has become so widespread that it has consumed and destroyed more than two thirds of Sudan’s forests. Soil erosion near major rivers has increased flooding, contaminating drinking water and spreading water-borne diseases like cholera, which takes a heavy toll on a population already weakened by malnutrition. So too, many farmers have become over-reliant on single crops, which has negatively affected farm productivity, particularly in light of increased climate variability and the crop loss that comes with pest and parasite infestations.

Environmental challenges are further exacerbated by poverty and a lack of agricultural extension services to train farmers in modern agricultural techniques and better land management practices. Many smallholder farmers lack access to improved seeds and cannot afford the labour necessary for ploughing, seeding and weeding. Financial impediments disproportionately affect women farmers, who often require hired labour to undertake heavy manual work. As a result, soil fertility is deteriorating, farm productivity is low, and rain water is not adequately managed. Environmental degradation has also served to exacerbate long-standing political and resource conflicts within Sudan. A civil war lasting over 50 years between Sudan’s northern and southern regions ended in the signing of a peace agreement in 2005 and the secession of South Sudan in 2011, while conflict continues in Darfur, western Sudan. These conflicts have displaced millions of families, creating tensions over land and further stretching already-depleted natural resources.

Women in rural Sudan

Women make a sizable contribution to Sudan’s agricultural sector, and most Sudanese families depend on women’s farming for their food and income. Gedaref is no different – the state provides a large portion of Sudan’s sorghum, millet, groundnuts and vegetables through an agricultural economy driven to a large extent by the contributions of women farmers whose role is severely undervalued. While women farmers in rural areas play an active role in sustaining the region’s agricultural economy, they are routinely neglected by policy makers and excluded from accessing the services and resources they need to manage their land effectively.
Critically, women have a difficult time securing land tenure and property rights, a significant challenge given the composition of the agricultural workforce. Women constitute more than 80 per cent of the labour force in the traditional (non-irrigated) agricultural sector yet hold only one per cent of registered land titles. Only five to six per cent of land titles are held jointly by men and women. As a consequence, the majority of women farmers are unable to use their farms as collateral and, therefore, are unable to access credit. Without access to finance, women cannot purchase the farm inputs necessary to manage their farms – never mind make balanced and informed choices that prioritize sustainable practices – or pay for hired labour to assist in land preparation and harvesting.

In Gedaref, it is common for men to migrate to cities in search of employment, leaving women to provide for their families and manage their land. Women, in fact, have few economic opportunities outside of agriculture; it is the occupation of 97 per cent of women in the state. For lack of mechanized equipment, women tend to weed, sow and harvest by hand, while fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides are generally unaffordable for them. Despite these barriers, women farmers manage the majority of food crops, as well as retaining responsibility for collecting fresh water and fuel wood.

Zenab for Women in Development

The central role of women in both economic development and food security is undervalued in Gedaref, as it is across much of Sudan. Agricultural extension services provided by the government are also anaemic, leaving women with few options for agricultural training, technical services or access to credit and savings programmes.

Zenab for Women in Development was founded in 2000 to improve the status of women in Sudan, with the stated objectives of improving the livelihoods of women, enabling women to advocate for their rights, and contributing to sustainable development in rural areas and those regions affected by conflict and natural disasters. The initiative began as the work of a local academic, and was named in honour of her mother, Zenab M. Nour, a pioneering native of Gedaref who was the first woman from the state to receive a formal education. Carrying on the efforts of Zenab, the initiative's work was initially supported by a number of small project grants from organisations such as the African Women's Development Fund, UNIFEM (now UN Women), the international women's rights NGO MADRE, and the Irmas Foundation, as well as private donations from within Sudan and the international Sudanese diaspora.

From its outset, the initiative has taken a multidimensional approach to empowering women, identifying appropriate funding opportunities and entry points for interventions across the human development scale. In practice, this has meant a broad portfolio of programme areas, incorporating: projects to improve women's literacy; infrastructure investments in rural primary schools; improving livelihood opportunities and food security for women in marginalised areas; enhancing access to rural health services with a focus on women (including combating harmful social practices such as FGM and violence against women, awareness-raising on HIV/AIDS, and providing information on reproductive health); providing legal aid services and logistic support for vulnerable communities, including the promotion of women's rights; civic education encouraging women's participation in political processes, as community leaders, and in conflict-resolution; and programmes that aim to foster values of peace and democracy.

Since 2000, Zenab's work across these programme areas has spanned a diverse range of partnerships, target beneficiaries, and geographic focuses: although the organization began its work in Gedaref, it has expanded to work in other parts of Sudan, including Darfur. As an indication of its broad range of impacts across the development spectrum, Table 1 provides an overview of the ways in which the initiative's past programs have advanced progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

Women Farmers Unite

Since 2005, Zenab's flagship programme has been its women farmers' union, the first of its kind in Sudan. This initiative – ‘Women Farmers Unite’ – has been supported by MADRE, a US-based international women's movement that partners with grassroots initiatives around the world in support of women's empowerment. Zenab began by conducting a needs assessment survey of 20 rural communities in Gedaref to get a sense of the predominant challenges facing women farmers and village primary schools. This survey highlighted the interconnected challenges of climate variability, droughts, post-conflict recovery, and the disempowerment of women that were acting to restrict the livelihoods and wellbeing of women farmers.

Based on the findings of this survey, the organization designed an intervention with the aim of increasing and diversifying the incomes of women farmers. Participants were supplied with seeds and farming equipment, including ploughs and, in some cases, a tractor. Along with agricultural extension services on issues such as crop rotation and adapting to the effects of climate change, women have been provided with human rights trainings, medical supplies, and education targeted at improving literacy and computer skills. This holistic package of support and training has empowered women to organize in women farmer groups, which are each members within the women farmers' union. Testament to both the success of the programme and the demand for the services and platform it provides, the union grew from 10 groups in a single network across two municipalities in 2008 to a remarkable 585 groups in 58 networks across 12 municipalities in 2012, serving around 3,000 women.

Organizational and governance structure

Participatory and democratic principles are central to this work. Each women farmer group elects a member to be represented in the strategic discussions of the union's assembly. Women undertaking work on the ground are directly involved in the planning and implementation of programmes, creating a feedback loop to ensure that projects are demand-driven and responsive to local needs. Rather than passive recipients of development support, women have become drivers of positive change in their communities, leading to a sense of empowerment and collective accomplishment.
Zenab currently oversees the work of the women farmers’ union, along with the other projects in its portfolio, from two main offices located in the cities of Khartoum and Gedaref. Its staff members include nine paid workers, including an administrative and finance manager, executive secretary, accountant, and consultants on the agricultural programme and human rights issues. The remaining ten members – including the founder and president, as well as the coordinators of the initiative’s health and women’s economic empowerment programmes – are volunteers. Ten staff positions, including most of the senior roles, are held by women.

<table>
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<th>Goal</th>
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| **MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger** | • Worked in refugee camps and across Gedaref to distribute seed varieties and hand tools for improved agriculture  
• Benefits at least 1,500 women farmers via a women farmers’ union through the provision of micro-credit and training on nutrition |
| **MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education** | • Supports ten pupils each year (seven girls, three boys) from poor families to attend primary school by paying registration fees; advocated for the waiving of school fees  
• Renovated ten classrooms in rural schools, distributing school materials for 500 students and free school meals to 200 poor students  
• Improved sanitation and water access in primary schools; installed gates and made infrastructure improvements to improve accessibility for disabled children |
| **MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women** | • Conducted education programmes and symposiums on gender issues in different villages, bringing together community and religious leaders;  
• Led training workshops and capacity building for more than 300 women leaders, and encouraged political participation via workshops (reaching a total of 250 women)  
• Led campaigns to raise awareness of violence against women  
• Conducted adult education programmes for women, and empowered women farmers through the women farmers’ union |
| **MDGs 4 & 5: Reduce child mortality and improve maternal health** | • Initiated programmes to combat the maternal mortality rate in Southern Sudan, one of the highest in the world  
• Organized 30 workshops throughout Gedaref to raise awareness on the issue of FGM, targeting midwives in particular  
• Held “medical weeks’ in Gedaref city and in displaced peoples’ camps, with more than 500 children and 200 pregnant women examined  
• Distributed free medicine |
| **MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases** | • Organized symposiums to mark World AIDS Day  
• Supported the Sudan National AIDS Programme and the Ministry of Health’s Education Department to give 3-day training courses on HIV prevention for 100 women from across Gedaref  
• Ran poster and brochure campaigns in schools and refugee camps to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS  
• Targeted specific training for hospital cleaners and midwives to help them avoid HIV/AIDS or hepatitis transmission |
| **MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability** | • Installed drinking water systems and sanitation improvements in schools in rural areas  
• Integrated tree-planting and environmental education in programmes in dryland areas to combat desertification |
| **MDG 8: Develop a global partnership for development** | • Organized events on international days for AIDS, women, and poverty eradication to raise local awareness of these issues  
• Established networks of NGOs in both Gedaref and Khartoum, and participated in networks active on a range of issues |
Key Activities and Innovations

Zenab for Women in Development focuses its activities on four key programme areas: agriculture, education and reproductive health (including child health, female genital mutilation, and HIV/AIDS), and peace-building. The common thread unifying the organization’s work is promotion of women’s rights and activities that will empower women to raise their status in Sudanese society.

**Empowering women in agriculture**

The women farmers’ union is the chief means through which Zenab for Women in Development achieves its aim of empowering women farmers to improve and diversify their agricultural income. Activities and interventions focus on improving the productivity of land and crops, overseeing agricultural cooperatives, providing agricultural training and capacity building, and facilitating access to finance.

When the initiative began in 2005, women farmers in the villages of Wad Daief, Wad Assayed, Wad Assanosi, Al Hamra, Abunnaga and Ginan were the target population. The group has since expanded to support over 3,000 women farmers in 12 municipalities of Gedaref.

The organization uses support groups to mobilize local women farmers. Zenab for Women in Development oversees the management and governance of support groups, networks and the union itself. Each network is responsible for providing their members with training, access to agricultural information and advocacy services. Each women’s support group, meanwhile, maintains a bank account containing funds which are used to finance agricultural projects and other capacity building activities. Access to credit has been an important aspect of the agriculture programme. Zenab for Women in Development serves as a de facto guarantor for women farmers who would otherwise not be able to access credit or provide needed collateral. As a result, more than 60 per cent of women participating in the programme have been able to access funds which are put towards renting larger areas of arable land, planting cash crops (like sesame and cotton), purchasing livestock, and diversifying their incomes in other ways that increase their self-sufficiency.

The growing network of farmer groups is also leveraged to provide network members with agricultural training in land productivity, conservation farming, livestock rearing and more. The organizational framework is a ‘train-the-trainers’ programme, through which more than 40 agricultural extension officers have been trained to provide outreach and support in their respective communities. Extension officers provide both technical and follow-up support, ensuring ongoing assistance and responsiveness to local needs. Among the trainings provided are the use of improved seed varieties (those adapted to short rainy seasons), crop rotation, ploughing and organic composting.

The organization has also used its agricultural extension officers to introduce new vegetables and crops like groundnut and sunflower and to disseminate seeds, hand tools, fertilizers and weed killers. Gas stoves have also been distributed to reduce reliance on firewood, with training that emphasizes forest conservation, tree-planting and responsible waste management. Workshops have been developed to help women farmers adapt to climate change by providing information on new weather patterns, instruction on how to adjust soil preparation, planting and harvesting accordingly, and training in how to harvest rainwater and dig shallow wells in villages.

**Education and reproductive health**

One of the obstacles to improving girls’ educational attainment in rural areas was clear dissatisfaction with the infrastructure, upkeep and quality of primary schools. Many schools had fallen into disrepair and were perpetually underfunded and underequipped to meet the educational needs of students. Zenab has responded by implementing maintenance programmes which have constructed additional classrooms and school houses, improved the quality of toilets and sanitation services, and facilitated access to clean drinking water. At present, the organization is overseeing the construction of a primary school for girls in a rural Gedaref community, sponsored by Zain, a leading regional mobile telecommunications operator.
It is hoped that these investments will increase the willingness of parents to send their daughters to school in a region where social pressures already serve as a barrier.

The organization has also responded to local demand for support services in reproductive health. Awareness-raising campaigns in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have helped sensitize the local population to the dangers of HIV/AIDS. The group has also campaigned aggressively against female genital mutilation, also aiming to bring the issue to the attention of young women. Other topics covered in educational campaigns include violence against women, early marriage and family planning. In one current project, Zenab is helping to provide training to 60 rural midwives in Gedaref, Kassala, and Red Sea States on standard obstetric care to reduce mortality rates for mothers and children.

Education has also been extended through the provision of legal aid, facilitating access to justice, and establishing a permanent legal aid centre in Gedaref city in cooperation with UNDP, all of which aim to better represent marginalized social groups in the Sudanese justice system. Zenab has also partnered with the National Endowment for Democracy to conduct workshops on basic human rights and laws that hinder gender equality and injustice.

Peace-building, conflict resolution and disaster relief

Sudan is currently in an interim transitional period following the 2005 signing of a comprehensive peace agreement. As the country rebuilds, Zenab for Women in Development provides local women with civil education and training in how to take advantage of their full rights and play an active part in democratic processes. Through the farmer networks, the group provides in-depth training to women councillors in order to help them represent their constituencies effectively. To encourage women and young people to vote, Zenab for Women in Development distributes pamphlets explaining the role of citizens in the election process, and promotes voting and the importance of women’s participation using local mass media. The organization has also targeted human rights education to women in prison, in particular about their right to legal aid.

Zenab for Women in Development has also established a women’s leadership centre where workshops and forums are held on conflict resolution and women’s empowerment. This has been a forum for training women councillors on the Sudanese constitution, law and political processes, leadership, financial management, and women’s rights. Workshops held by the organization have provided a neutral platform where women from different political parties can put aside partisanship and focus on the creation and cultivation of networks that will put women’s rights on the political agenda.

Two projects that reflect this focus include working with the UNDP Sudan Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme (SDDRSP) on social re-integration for female ex-combatants, and a recently-concluded project in South Darfur that trained 15 village midwives and supported 200 women farmers by raising awareness on HIV/AIDS and of new agricultural techniques, co-funded by UNFPA, the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDA).

The organization has also been actively involved in the distribution of food to communities in need and the provision of humanitarian assistance to communities displaced by violence or natural disasters. The Gash River floods every rainy season, driving many people from their homes. The fighting and violence in Darfur have also led to a substantial number of refugee camps and displaced people. In some refugee camps – like that set up in Sherif – the organization distributed educational materials, gave out toys and built functioning latrines for local children. In both post-conflict and post-disaster zones, the group has conducted peace-building training.
Impacts

**BIODIVERSITY IMPACTS**

With a focus on women farmers, as well as a balance between improved livelihoods and environmental sustainability, Zenab for Women in Development has had wide-ranging positive impacts on local biodiversity and ecosystem health. Agricultural training activities coordinated by the women farmers’ union focus on improving soil and water quality so that women farmers can improve the productivity of their land, much of which has been degraded through years of poor management and overuse. Population growth in Sudan, and in this region in particular, has put a serious strain on soil quality and water resources. Land and soil are under significant pressure to produce enough food to keep pace with local demand.

Taking these development drivers into consideration, Zenab encourages the planting of a diverse range of vegetables and crops, with a particular emphasis on those that return nutrients to the soil. The group also promotes crop rotation and the use of groundnut as an organic fertilizer to ensure that the land does not become depleted. Training is provided in soil preparation and maintenance, and workshops have been given on environmental conservation and the value of trees in maintaining soil quality and water functions.

Tree planting constitutes an important aspect of the organization’s overall conservation practices and environmental stewardship. Zenab for Women in Development works with women farmers to maintain ‘green belts’, planting trees in areas where deforestation is most clearly affecting soil and water quality. The growing network of women farmers also plants trees near schools, in household gardens and along main streets. In the village of Hamra, for example, a group of women have established a tree nursery, which is being developed to expand to the point where it will be capable of feeding tree-planting efforts across the state.

The organization also actively distributes propane gas stoves and trains local women in their use. The stoves are promoted as an alternative to wood burning stoves, which are the most common form of cooking stove amongst the local population, but which require significant inputs of time and energy to locate fuel and which have a negative impact on health when used indoors. The use of propane gas stoves, by contrast, has reduced pressure on local forests, which were being overharvested.

**SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS**

The socioeconomic impacts of Zenab for Women in Development’s work are wide-ranging. Among the most successful outcomes of their programmes, training and interventions have been local improvements in food security, household incomes, school infrastructure, and the access of girls and young women to formal education. The network approach that underpins the women farmers’ union has helped to build social cohesion and empower an impressive number of previously marginalized women to become active agents in positively transforming the local economy and the development trajectory of the traditional agricultural sector. The initiative is also based on democratic principles of representation and participation, which bode well for its prospects of long-term sustainability.

A large percentage of the women who have benefited from engagement with Zenab for Women in Development – whether through agricultural training, tree planting or livelihoods diversification – are heads of their respective households. The evolving trend in the region has been for men to travel to cities and urban centres in search of work and improved vocational opportunities, while the women are left behind to manage the family landholdings and raise the children. A troubling number of men are also increasingly being drawn into the various facets of Sudan’s long-running civil war and armed conflicts.
Land tenure security and access to credit

Women hold primary responsibility for managing the traditional agricultural sector, as well as collecting water and firewood for household consumption. Despite these substantial contributions to domestic life, sustenance, and family health and wellbeing, women farmers continue to face important barriers to owning land and accessing the financial services that would make possible small-scale entrepreneurship or the kinds of local ingenuity that can lead to pathways out of poverty. Women contribute more than 80 per cent of traditional agricultural sector labour, yet the overwhelming majority of farms are held in the names of male family members, and a negligible five to six per cent of land titles are jointly held. With no legal claim to the land they farm, women are prohibited from using their land as collateral to access credit.

Zenab for Women in Development has made land tenure securitization and access to finance priority areas of their programming. The organization provides micro-loans to women farmers so they can purchase the tools and labour that will make possible improvements in the productivity of their land and rental of additional land to expand their agricultural outputs. They have also acted as guarantors on loans for women applying for credit from banks. This advocacy and support is leading to a change in the normative orientation of lending in the state, importantly towards a credit climate that is more favourable to and inclusive of women.

Agricultural extension services

Exclusion from land ownership and formal credit systems are not the only barriers faced by women in rural Sudan. Equally oppressive and economically debilitating has been the inability of women to access agricultural training, technical support, and extension services. Zenab for Women in Development aims to fill this gap in service provision, primarily through the efforts of the women farmers’ union it helped to establish.

Training is provided to women farmers on crop diversification, including the introduction of cash crops such as cotton and sesame, which combine with more traditional crop varieties to provide a broader income base and make the farmers less dependent on single crops. The organization also works through a train-the-trainers programme to provide agricultural extension services that enable women to access improved seed varieties and fertilizers. The result has been substantial improvements in local food security, agricultural outputs, and household incomes. These new sources of income have been invested into school fees, textbooks and uniforms for children – a noteworthy investment in a region where families often cannot send their children to school because the costs are prohibitively expensive relative to meeting sustenance needs.

Improving access to education

In addition to raising household incomes, which have had spill-over effects on school enrolment, Zenab for Women in Development is active in removing the obstacles and disincentives that exist for parents to send their children – especially girls – to school. Importantly, the organization has leveraged its networks to construct wells and toilets at primary schools that previously lacked these basic facilities to ensure a higher standard of potable water access and sanitation. They have also arranged for the installation of water storage tanks to ensure students have reliable access to clean drinking water. Provision of these services has been complemented by efforts to build schoolhouses and additional classrooms. With an improved educational environment and functioning sanitation facilities, parents are much more likely to send their children to school.

Empowerment of women

Perhaps the most significant impact of the organization’s work – and in particular the women farmers’ union – has been the empowerment of women, and the creation of social cohesion that has resulted from the development and growth of the network of women farmers groups. These groups have been catalytic in changing how women are perceived and treated in their communities, serving as an instrument of positive social change and transformation. Women are now able to access micro-finance and bank loans, previously only available to men. This has had positive implications for land management and productivity, which has improved women’s livelihoods and economic security. Gains in individual earning capacity have translated to improvements in community infrastructure – many women have voluntarily invested in creating gathering spaces for women’s groups to hold meetings and plan actions to address persistent environmental, social and economic problems. The women of the Wad Deef community, as another example, invested in bringing electricity to their village. Crucially, the women in Zenab for Women in Development networks are now empowered through its civic training – educating women on democratic processes, Sudan’s laws and constitution, women’s rights and the importance of women’s participation in elections both as voters and candidates.

POLICY IMPACTS

Through its engagement with women’s participation in Sudan’s electoral processes, Zenab aims to have an indirect impact on policies affecting its women farmer constituents. In the run-up to the landmark referendum in 2011 that led to the creation of South Sudan, Zenab played a leading role in fostering women’s political participation in Gedaref. Over three months, Zenab helped to raise awareness among the Southern Sudan Referendum and encourage a peaceful and effective voting process. This included conducting two three-day workshops for women leaders in the states of Kassala and Gedaref and facilitating ten forums taking place across Gedaref state encouraging women to take part in the voting process. Collectively, these gatherings produced 50 participants trained as local observers, 40 of whom were women. All observers were trained to observe polling, counting, and tabulation processes. Zenab staff members were trained as trainers, and were involved in training representatives from political parties across Gedaref, Kassala and Red Sea states.
SUSTAINABILITY

Zenab relies on funding and other support from a number of key partners as outlined in detail below. Although not financially self-sufficient, the network model of women's self-help groups facilitates mutually supportive programming whereby women farmers are positioned to assist each other without relying too heavily on external inputs. Zenab is in the process of working to expand its support base to include local government authorities and NGOs.

A key element of Zenab's organizational sustainability is the involvement of women farmers not only as recipients and beneficiaries of its activities, but as the principal actors and agents of positive local change. A participatory approach ensures that women are involved in all stages of planning and implementation of Zenab's activities. The majority of activities are undertaken specifically because they have been prioritized by participating women.

REPLICATION

The growth of Zenab's network, particularly since 2008, has been impressive. Beginning with an association of 10 women's groups formed into a single network across two municipalities in Gedaref, Zenab has since expanded to include 585 women's groups in 58 networks across 12 municipalities. The rate of growth and the success with which replication has been achieved is nothing short of phenomenal. The multiplier effect can be attributed, at least partially, to Zenab's train-the-trainer programme, which provides technical and capacity building training to women leaders from individual villages who are then enlisted to serve as extension officers and support workers in their communities and beyond. To date, the networks have been confined to Gedaref, but the model has shown potential for replication in Darfur and could be adopted in other agricultural provinces.

Zenab also participates as an active member in a number of knowledge-sharing and advocacy networks in Sudan, illustrating the power of collective bargaining for bringing about change. Among these networks are the Human Rights and Legal Aid Network (HRLAN), the Sudanese Network for HIV/AIDS and the Sudanese Network for FGM Eradication, as well as national CSO networks for Darfur, poverty eradication, and civic education and election monitoring. Regionally, Zenab is a member of the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA), a network of CSOs from Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Uganda.

PARTNERS

Zenab maintains partnerships with key donor and implementing agencies, including UNFPA, UNICEF, FAO, UNDP and UNIFEM. Other supporters include the National Endowment for Democracy, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDA), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the embassies of Finland, Japan and France, among others.

Zenab's agricultural programme receives support from Mama Cash, Madre, African Women's Development Fund, the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) and the gender equality programme of the Association of the Netherlands Municipalities (VNG). VNG also provides support through its gender equity programme to improve the leadership skills of rural women, and encourage them to run for election on local councils.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Province of Gedaref support the organization in the provision of technical assistance and improved seed varieties of certain cash crops. Zenab also works with UNDP Sudan on the provision of legal aid, civic education and capacity building.
FURTHER REFERENCE

- Zenab for Women in Development website: zenab.org
- Zenab for Women in Development Equator Initiative profile page on equatorinitiative.org

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