PROJECT FACTSHEET

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WATER FROM THE NILE: A TREASURE TO BE CONSERVED

A villager helps make bricks to repair irrigation canals. © SDC

Country / Region
Egypt / Aswan

Thematic focus
Water, Economic developpement

Duration
November 2012 – July 2017

Budget
CHF 3'385'207

While the population of Egypt continues to rise, the volume of the Nile remains constant. Water must therefore be used sparingly. This is what the SDC is encouraging people to do in ten villages in the north of Aswan Governorate as part of an effort to improve irrigation practices. The project aims to boost the land's productivity and increase farmers' income.

Egypt's population growth and urbanisation trend are driving the country's water needs. In Nasr El Nuba and Kom Ombo, two districts in the north of Aswan Governorate, water is a rare commodity owing in part to misuse by local farmers. Evidence indicates that half of the water used for irrigation is quite simply wasted and the dilapidated state of the water infrastructure does not help the situation. Leaks in a number of irrigation canals lead to the loss of several litres of water per day. As a result, fields that lie at the end of the irrigation system receive little water and are hard to farm.

Conserving limited resources

In 2012, the SDC started a project in Nasr El Nuba and Kom Ombo to improve the state of the irrigation canals and instruct farmers in the efficient use of water. Repairs have been made to 20 mesqas (third-level irrigation canals) so far, and water leakage has decreased. At the same time, the SDC has set up 20 Water Users Associations from among the farmers and village women in an effort to manage resources effectively and fairly. Every farmer contributes either time or money to repairing the mesqas. This approach encourages a sense of individual responsibility for keeping the canals in working order. The scope of the SDC's project also includes awareness-raising campaigns to promote responsible farming practices among the populace.

Increasing household income

Improved water management has generated other positive effects as well. It has boosted the income level of the very poor in Aswan Governorate, where unemployment is high. When leaks are repaired, there are no water losses from the canals and the plots of land receive the water they need. This allows the farmers to work the land and enjoy a larger harvest. It is estimated that yields will increase by 15% thanks to the repairs made to the 20 mesqas and the spread of new farming methods. The next phase of the project aims at delivering basic financial services to villagers. More than 1,400 micro-loans will be provided.

Villagers from Nasr El Nuba and Kom Ombo propose initiatives to resolve local problems through their Water Users Associations. © SDC

Bigger role for women and young people

The SDC is committed to promoting the participation of women, who are often overlooked and undervalued within their community. Around 400 women and 600 young people were given the training they need to take the initiative and get involved in local activities. They are encouraged to assume responsibilities within the Water Users Associations, to communicate their concerns and to engage in discussions. As a result of these efforts, the women of Nasr El Nuba and Kom Ombo have filed 40 social and environmental initiatives – clean-up campaigns, street beautification and interest groups – and have then gone ahead with their ideas.

Easing conflicts

The project has had one final benefit: efforts to share water equitably have helped ease tensions between the Nubians and the Saaydas, the two dominant ethnic groups in Nasr El Nuba and Kom Ombo. Contacts between the groups continue to flourish. The two communities find themselves side by side during awareness-raising campaigns, classes, celebrations and football matches.