

Feature

Development

Beel Dakatia : Economic Use Counts

Canal Could Turn Sinai Green

by Gouranga Nandy

by Neil Moorhouse from Cairo

BEEL Dakatia, once rich in agriculture resources, is now under water for more than ten years. Once breeze played with paddy plants on this plain land. The people in and around the entire Beel had a dream for a bright future. But now the Beel is eight to ten feet under water almost round the year.

The people of Rangpur as well as Dumuria and other thanas around depended for their livelihood on agriculture. The crops of the field ensured a better life for them. But the water stagnation has thrown them into an uncertain life.

Although the project is now at a primary stage, the people connected with it are hundred per cent hopeful of its success. Shareholders are working in different units for the implementation of the programme. They are getting remunerations for their services and the amount are being added to the invested money.

The people of Rangpur union are the worst sufferers as a consequence of the water stagnation of Beel Dakatia. According to statistics published in 1981, total of thirty one thousand unions have been badly affected. Only a small number of people have found some sources of income. But the rest do not know how they will be able to cope with the emerging difficult situation.

Prodipan, a non-governmental development organisation, came forward to assist the people facing problems. Prodipan formed a number of groups among the people in the area. Prodipan took up an income generating project on experimental basis. Hog-rearing projects have been taken

up considering the animal's local marketing potential. Under the direct supervision of the landless organisation, seventy-six selected members of the landless organisation were given one piglet each in the first phase. Prodipan invested the entire money in it. Besides, the organisation supplied one cage to each of the members also got one cage each free of cost for hog-rearing as an additional profit.

Considering the preliminary success of the project, Prodipan is taking up other income-generating schemes, first of their kinds, in the area. Now, the main task for the organisation is to utilise the vast areas of arable land and also

identify new income-generating projects for the people of the areas, who are still fighting for survival.

Prodipan has started cultivation on three and a half acres of water logged areas on experimental basis. A three-year contract has been signed with the owners of the land in this matter. According to the contract a fixed amount will be given to the owners.

Different kinds of fish fries were released in the project areas during the month of February and March this year. The fish fries included Ruhl, Katla, Silver Carp, Grass Carp and Shrimp.

programme, if the projects run smoothly at least forty thousand taka will be earned as net profit in the first year as against the investment of sixty thousand taka. The project is expected to earn a net profit of at least sixty to seventy thousand taka each of the following two years.

As Prodipan has financed the project, the groups involved in the project will refund the invested money, including ten per cent dividends. Each of the members of the group is a share-holder of the project. In the first year, if the members return the invested money, each share-holder will reinvest fifty per cent of the total dividends which he received earlier. He may invest twentyfive per cent of his profit in the group activity and the rest can be spent for his own purposes.

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different units for the implementation of the programme. They are getting remunerations for their services and the amount are being added to the invested money.

It is not possible to assess at the moment how many people will benefit under the project by utilising the stagnant water of the entire Beel Dakatia. But Hossain Mondal, supervisor of the Prodipan, Rangpur Project, expressed his optimism "our targets will be more than met if they are not affected by natural calamities."

When implemented, over fortyeight thousand acres of land of the areas will be saved from water-logging and this will help produce huge quantities of additional crops annually and the long standing demands of the people of the areas will be met. But the question arises whether the poor people of the areas will be able to reap the harvest of the project or not. The poor and the distressed people always want work but they expect proper co-operation and coordination in this regard, which will help accelerate the process of changing their lot.

AN enormous canal being built in the Sinai could transform expanses of desert into green fields. The barren Sinai, lodged between the continents of Africa and Eurasia, is richly fertile and abundant in minerals, but has never been fully exploited.

Historically, it has been a battleground for marching armies across the continents. More recently it was the scene of repeated conflicts between Egyptian and Israeli forces.

Till now, lack of any large-scale water supplies had made the very idea of fully developing the region unthinkable. Yearly rainfall is below 100 mm and groundwater is scarce. The fertility of the region, however, is common knowledge.

include rice and barely. Says Shash: "The Salam Canal can't only be seen from the perspective of agriculture. Once water is flowing into the Sinai, an industrial society can also be created based on the mining of mineral deposits purportedly abundant in the Yarak, El Hilal and Dalfa Mountains in central Sinai. Agriculture is limited, but industry is not."

Sinai's minerals include albet, kaolin, coal, gypsum, granite, sandstone, marble and a wide variety of gemstones.

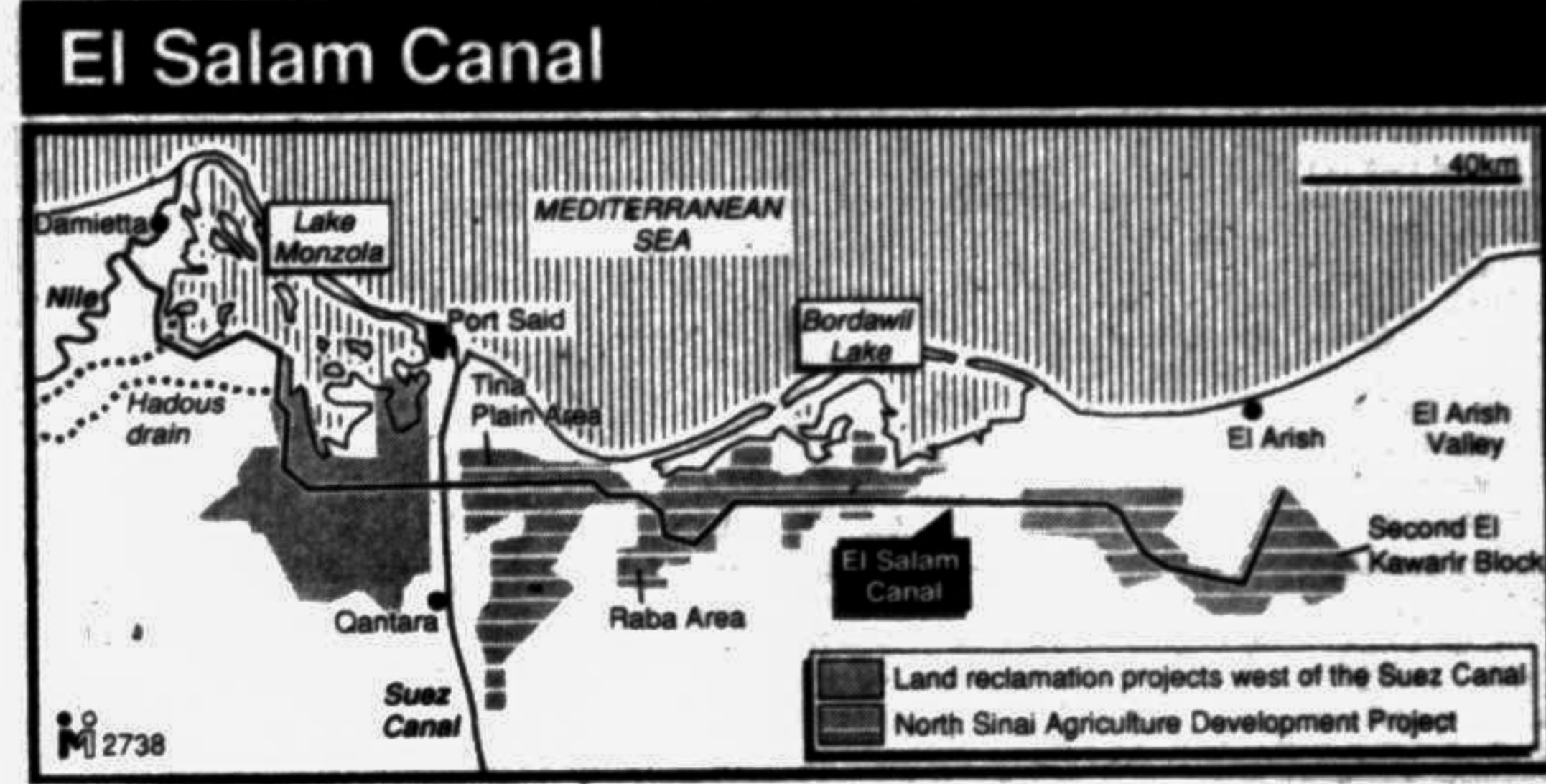
Part of the plan to turn the desert green is to establish new communities. The growing Egyptian population of 58 million is choking the fertile Nile valley and overburdening the cities.

The authorities will encour-

customary laws governing land ownership and the project could result in social unrest. Despite claims by Sinai officials that the Bedouin lifestyle has already dramatically changed, the most prominent impression the traveller still gets is that of Bedouin women shepherding their flocks.

A World Bank study has also aroused concern among archaeologists that historic sites and monuments in Sinai could be drowned by the canal. The Mediterranean coastal zone of the Sinai is the most important historical land bridge linking Egypt and Canaan from pre-dynastic times onwards.

Professor Fayza Heykal, of the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation, says: "Forty-five



For centuries, Bedouin people have been reclaiming and cultivating large areas of arid desert by trapping rain water in deep underground wells. By siphoning water from the Nile, the new El Salam Canal will bring a ready water supply and develop the peninsula into an agricultural and industrial area.

The North Sinai Agricultural Project (NSADP), as proposed by the Egyptian government, envisages the reclamation of an estimated 400,000 acres of desert along the Mediterranean coast. The first phase is complete. The canal begins just south of Port Said, making its way through the desert as far as the Suez Canal, which it crosses by a 1.3 km-long siphon and an eastward extension of the canal of about 80 km into Sinai. It then goes for 160 km along the coastal area to El Arish, just 45 km from the Israeli border.

Water from the canal will be siphoned into the heart of the Sinai desert. Workers are currently building the canal at the small coastal town of Balouza.

It is estimated the Salam Canal will carry three billion cubic metres of water a year. Feasibility studies maintain that 500,000 acres of land in North Sinai could be irrigated with an extra 200,000 acres west of the Suez Canal.

General Mounir Shash, Governor of North Sinai, says: "The Salam Canal is a national project that will bring prosperity not only to Sinai, but also to the whole of Egypt. The project is more important than the Aswan High Dam."

Abdel Rahman Shalaby, a top Water Ministry official, says the canal will provide one-tenth of the total agricultural production of Egypt. Crops will

age families to move to the planned desert cities and hope an estimated 21,600 families can be accommodated in new villages. However, previous housing projects in the desert have proven to be unpopular.

Sinai inhabitants total 250,000. The area depends on water and food supplies brought from the mainland by an often erratic train and truck service. Power failures have been common.

In North Sinai, the government has now sought to make sites have already been identified and partly excavated in the area of Belouza (ancient Pelusium). They date from prehistory through to medieval times. We have no idea as yet how many more there are.

Archaeologists have discovered 12 fortresses, an ancient barrage, crocodile skeletons, and Roman baths with exquisite mosaics in North West Sinai. The possible destruction of thousands of sites has aroused little international interest because they are mainly of archaeological rather than tourist interest.

Says Heykal: "There has not been much feedback from UNESCO. So far response has been only at an academic, not political level."

French, Polish, Canadian and German archaeological institutes are offering to help excavate the area.

The political implications of the canal are also not to be underestimated. Historically the Sinai desert has acted as a buffer zone between Israel and Egypt. Since 1948 four wars have been fought between the two countries.

In 1967 Israel overran the desert until finally in 1982, as a result of the Camp David talks, Sinai was returned to Egypt. Previously, the land has been invaded by Persians, Romans, Greeks, Arabs and Turks. Significantly, Salam means peace. — Gemini News

When complete the El Salam Canal could turn the Sinai desert into an agricultural and industrial area. It will carry three billion cubic metres of water a year and irrigate 500,000 acres of land. But, reports Gemini News Service, the human cost of the project for the Bedouin nomadic lifestyles will be serious and hundreds of archaeological sites could be lost.

and the development strategies adopted by most of our governments have failed to address themselves to the needs of the majority of our people.

African women feel subjugated and feel the need to change the situation. But the domination imposed by society, by stifling women's initiative, often prevents them from expressing their aspirations, and from thinking how best to wage their struggle.

It is necessary for the political consciousness of the majority of African women to be raised for them to participate in social production an begin to receive a scientific and cultural perspective so that they can fight the barriers that oppress them.

It is unrealistic to expect viable development to be initiated and sustained while the burden of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank conditionalities weigh so heavily on the daily lives of the poor, particularly women. The export-oriented policies required under IMF adjustment practices have increased women's participation in cash crop production and other foreign exchange activities, but at the same time have devalued the traditional areas of women's work, such as subsistence agriculture, and reinforced their marginalisation. Micro-level income-generating programmes for women have often, inadvertently, reinforced women's marginalisation from the wider economic process.

The Major Obstacle

The primary reality of our African societies today is that of neo-colonialism, which presents severe obstacles to us as African people. Neo-colonialism is the major obstacle to development in its human and broadest sense.

So, while the problems which we face with respect to our positions in society are specific to us as women, most of the problems are also common to all African workers and peasants in that our economies

Economic mismanagement, heavy external debts and unequal relations in the global economy have almost crippled some African economies, so Africa cannot afford to foster unsuitable development models which marginalise women. There is a need to define and implement a development strategy that will meet the needs of the majority of the African people.

Such a strategy requires certain preconditions. In the first place is the cancellation of debt payments as these have not benefited the majority of Africa's peoples, least of all women.

There must be a strategy that calls for the development of strong social movements struggling for the equality of all people and the establishment of institutions that ensure the control of Africa's wealth and resources by African people. In this struggle, both African men and women will have to work together.

There are examples of such strong social movements in certain parts of Africa. One that comes immediately to mind is the Organisation for Rural Advancement and Progress (ORAP) based in Zimbabwe.

Other African NGOs that are making important contributions to the empowerment of women are organisations like the Tanzanian Media Women's Organisation (TAMWA) and Women in Nigeria (WIN).

—Third World Network Features

Self-Reliance and Independence

A new society based on principles of popular participation, equality for women and the redistribution of wealth requires a creativity that can only develop in a context of self-reliance and true independence.

Many African women now see no point in being 'integrated' into the mainstream of Western-influenced development in which we have no choice in defining the kind of society we want.

Women, as the group most adversely affected by the existing development strategies, will have to be in the forefront of the definition of a new self-reliant and people-centred development.

African women can become full and equal participants in development only in a world organised along new social and productive lines.

This does not mean that the partial improvement of women's lives within the framework of the existing status quo, is impossible. Each gain of the ordinary peasant and working class woman represents a step leading human beings towards freedom and social equality. Each right that the African woman wins, brings her nearer the defined goal of full emancipation.

Why African Women are Still Left Behind

by Wanjiru Kihoro

ONE of the most important reasons for the deterioration of women's condition has been the development models adopted in most African countries.

The UN decade for women (1976-85) has not done much for the lot of African women, especially, in rural areas. Wanjiru Kihoro examines the reasons.

The other is the lack of attention to the barriers against women's full and equal participation in all aspects of life. Though much lip service has been paid to the equal participation of women in the male-dominated development circles, this has remained, by and large, 'integration' without serious thought or attempt towards genuine power-sharing with women.

international market system, in which growth is manifested in increased economic production. In this set-up, education and employment are seen as a means for income generation. Thus the common indicators used to determine women's involvement in development have been employment and education.

In a situation where most African women live in the rural areas, with 70-80% of them involved in subsistence agriculture, these indicators make little sense. Women make up 60-90% of the agricultural labour force, and produce 44% of all food. Rather than talk of income-generating projects, it makes better sense for development planners to recognise women's current productivity.

It is, however, difficult to see how within the current development models this could come about. As it is, women's roles in the economic and social sphere have not been taken into account in terms of Gross National Product (GNP) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or any of the indices which monitor progress or decline in terms of development. Women, as citizens, have had all too little say in national development plans, or in adjustment policies accepted by their governments.

Although the principal economic activity in Africa is agriculture and most agriculture is subsistence and done by women, development has not



been aimed at transforming this agricultural activity. Instead, there has been a growing emphasis on cash crops and non-food crops, causing a major setback in subsistence farming.

This has had serious repercussions on women and the rural communities. National levels have been affected as former food-producing communities shift to cash-crops for export. African countries that used to be self-sufficient in food production 30 or so years ago, are now importers of food.

Equality in Development

During the women's decade there was a shift in development circles from a preoccupation with the role of women within the family toward an understanding of the complexities of women's different roles. African women combine many roles in the production and reproduction arenas.

Thus the question is not one of 'integrating women in development', but rather how to achieve integrated sustainable development with women as equal participants with men. This is a point that many development planners and aid agencies have not quite taken on board.

National development plans have failed to adopt an integrative, coordinated approach to development in which the central role played by women will be actively recognised, so that strategies can be found for making women more fully and equally participants in development.

Issues of women and development in most African countries are often dealt with by a department in the Ministry of Culture and Social Development which also has the responsibility for youth, sports, culture, destitutes and so on. Placing women's issues in such a context, is a carry over from the colonial days when African women were regarded as objects of recreation (as in sports) or art (as in culture) or social liabilities (as with destitutes), rather than assets in the development process.

Despite the recognised limitations of focusing on women in isolation, ministries of women's affairs and women in development (WID) units, with largely female staff, still predominate in many countries. This needs changing.

Programmes supported by aid agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are no better. Most aid agencies that operate in Africa offer assistance aimed mainly at the improvement of the quality of life of target groups. NGOs are seen to play a vital role in

meeting the basic needs of underprivileged women, especially those residing in the rural areas.

Thus development is approached from the perspective of the satisfaction of basic needs. Such a perspective largely explains the conventional focus on programmes providing material resources, promoting income-generating skills, family welfare and access to education.

There is evidence to suggest that the preoccupation with these kinds of activities has tended to cloud the central issue of gender and the interaction between gender and development. In most cases, NGO action rarely promotes a level of awareness that will turn women participants in their projects into agents of change, as such projects do not seek to go into the roots of women's subordination. They tend to be organised around the structures that exist in the society and do not challenge the status quo or attempt to change the existing division of labour or other forms of discrimination against women.

Gender Bias

Many rural development projects founded by aid agencies appear to make women worse off. It is not surprising, therefore, that rural women sometimes resist these changes; in some cases projects have failed because of women's resistance to their role within them.

There is a well-known example of an unsuccessful attempt to introduce irrigated rice production in the Gambia. The planners had made the common false assumption of the male-headed household with the husband/father managing the resources on behalf of other members. There was also an assumption that men were the rice growers with full control over the necessary resources. Credits and other inputs were offered to the men. But in this case, it was the women who traditionally grew rice for household consumption and exchange.

The scheme was going to develop irrigated rice production on common lands to which women had secured use rights. With the support of project and government officials, men established exclusive rights to these common lands, pushing the women to inferior plots to continue cultivating traditional rice varieties.

The women had to negotiate all access to inputs, labour and finance through their husbands. The women were unwilling to provide labour on their husband's plots and de-

manded to be paid. The project failed.

A number of development projects have failed or negatively affected women because they have been designed on the assumption that the head of the household is the man, as the breadwinner, primarily involved in productive work outside the home, while the woman as the housewife and homemaker takes overall responsibility for the reproductive and domestic work involved in the organisation of the household. There is also the assumption that within the household there is an equal control over resources and power of decision-making between the man and the woman in matters affecting the household's livelihood. In parts of Africa, about 50% of households are headed by women and in refugee camps it is nearer 80-90%.

Feminism

Feminism is one of the most important keys to the participation of women in development. The feminist consciousness of the specific situation of women and the commitment to change it are sources of energy that can mobilise women.

Good Training — Secure Job

THE higher a person's vocational qualifications, the better his earnings and career prospects — and the greater his job security.

In Germany, the risk of unemployment is lowest among technical college and polytechnic graduates, whose unemployment rates lay between 3.0 and 3.5 per cent in 1990. The jobless rates to people with university degrees

