

Aquifers to provide clean water for Turkana, Kenya

BY RENEE DEHART
STAFF WRITER

16.4 million people living in Kenya do not have access to clean water.

Over 10,000 children die every year from diarrhea caused by consuming unsafe water.

But help is on the way.

On Sept. 11, satellites discovered five large aquifers in the desert region of Turkana in northern Kenya. The aquifers are deep enough to provide the Kenyan people clean water for at least 70 years.

Professor of Geology Dave Dobson explains that aquifers are porous layers of rock that people can tap for fresh water.

One of the aquifers, the Lotikipi, is estimated to be the size of Rhode Island, according to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the agency currently conducting underground drilling at the site.

Access to this clean drinking water would be a huge breakthrough for the Turkana people, who have survived without significant rainfall for over five years.

"(The new water source is) more important than oil," said Professor of Sociology and Anthropology Edwins Gwako.

Gwako holds that the increased availability of clean drinking water will provide new opportunities for the Turkana people.

"Economically, there is potential," Gwako said. "They can have irrigation, grow pasture, and have fish farms, agriculture and livestock."

In the past, the lack of clean water resources and shortage of rainwater have proved to be a deadly combination for Kenyan farmers.

"Every year, our livestock die from lack of water and pasture," Turkana farmer Zakayo Ekeno told New Partnership for Africa's Development Water Centers of Excellence.

Greater access to clean water will provide promising opportunities to improve irrigation in the area.

But most importantly, many argue, are the effects of the discovery on the lives of Turkana children.

According to UNICEF, in 2009, 81 percent of children in Turkana who should have been undergoing early childhood development education were not enrolled in school.

"It is very beneficial for the children, because they will spend less time looking around for water," Gwako said.

With a minimized search for water, Kenyan children could



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A recently discovered aquifer will provide the country of Kenya with water for 70 years, relieving the drought they have experienced.

see more time in school.

But while the possible outcomes of harnessing the water are overwhelmingly positive, many point to the challenges in unlocking the potential of the aquifers.

In a Bloomberg Businessweek article, "New Water Source Won't Quench the World's Thirst," Charles Kenny criticizes the hope many have for the new aquifers.

"(The challenge is) improving the infrastructure for quality networked supply, by digging trenches, laying pipes and building water and sewage treatment plants — which is expensive and difficult," Kenny said.

The infrastructure is a real concern for the Turkana region, which has been struggling in abject poverty.

However, the Kenyan government and UNESCO have showed great commitment to this project.

"This newly found wealth of water opens a door to a more prosperous future for the people of Turkana and the nation as a whole," Judi Wakhungu, cabinet secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Natural Resources told The New York Times. "We must now work to further explore these resources responsibly and safeguard them for future generations."

Syrian chemical weapons issue may resolve peacefully

BY VALERIA SOSA
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On Sept. 15, the U.S. and Russia agreed on a framework for the removal of chemical weapons in Syria.

Global attention surrounded Syria on Aug. 21, when a chemical weapon attack outside Damascus resulted in more than 1,400 casualties.

The U.S. accused Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime of instigating the attack and threatened to launch military strikes early on. President Obama had advocated the use of military force in Syria and asked Congress to support his position.

With Congress undecided, Obama's stance was mollified as the U.S. government entered negotiations with Russia to peacefully remove chemical weapons from the hands of the Syrian government.

"I'm glad (Obama) backed off," said Director of the Friends Center and Campus Ministry Coordinator Max Carter. "The vast majority of Americans didn't want to intervene militarily in Syria, and I'm glad he's using nonviolent means."

Overseeing the Syrian chemical weapon removal, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons reported that Syria

complied with the first part of the OPCW agreement by providing a declaration of chemical weapons.

While the OPCW has set the framework for the removal of chemical weapons in Syria, diplomats from the U.S., Russia, Britain, China and France are debating the terms of a U.N. resolution to enforce the agreement, according to The New York Times.

The orchestration of the U.S.-Russia deal averted U.S. military intervention, but the possibility remains if al-Assad's regime does not comply with the U.N. sanctioned agreement.

Relieved by the decision to discontinue pursuing military action, some Americans joined Sen. John McCain in warning Obama that he would face impeachment if he put "boots on the ground," according to CNN.

Philip Slaby, associate professor of history, commented in an email interview about the impact of the Syrian crisis on U.S. foreign policy.

"It really underscores the legacy of the Bush-era road to war in Iraq and the fatigue that the long war there has left," said Slaby. "Foreign powers are reluctant to rally to U.S. leadership for intervention, and the American public is also reluctant."

The failure of past U.S. military intervention

in the Middle East has made many wary of yet another intervention.

"Iraq was a disaster that no one wants to repeat," said Carter.

Others argue that there is a genuine difference between what happened in Iraq and what is happening today in Syria.

"In Iraq, a foreign power called for regime change and then invaded," said Mohja Kahf, associate professor of comparative literature and Middle Eastern studies at the University of Arkansas, in an email interview. "In Syria, we have a revolution and a regime that began, from the first day, killing its own citizens for protesting nonviolently in the streets."

Kahf, an Arab-American poet and author, highlighted that the civil war began with nonviolent protests from people who wanted freedom, human rights and the end of government corruption.

"The civil resistance is ongoing in Syria," said Kahf. "It is utterly marginalized in the world spotlight on the armed conflict, but it is building the infrastructure of a future Syria. Civil resistance is doing all this ... under the brutal repression of the regime."

According to The New York Times, the U.S. and Russia agreed that Syria has approximately 1,000 tons of precursor chemicals and chemical agents, including sulfur mustard and sarin gas.

"It still isn't clear who used the chemical weapons," said Carter. "But I think it is important to recognize that there is genuine human suffering. Regardless of who used them and how many people were killed, conventional weapons killed many more."

"We need to continue to seek diplomatic and nonviolent responses that minimize the suffering and bring justice and hope to the people in Syria."

"The vast majority of Americans didn't want to intervene militarily in Syria, and I'm glad (Obama is) using nonviolent means."

Max Carter, director of Friends Center & campus ministry coordinator