Mass deportation starts at new dam sites in eastern Sudan

The deportation of thousands of people living near the site of the Upper Atbara and Setit Dam Complex in Kassala state has started on Saturday.

The first 500 families were transported from the area of Wad El Helew, in the largest deportation operation in Sudan caused by the construction of dams. By mid-March, tens of thousands of residents will have been moved to alternative locations.

It is expected that the lakes created by the dam complex will affect people in Kassala’s Wad El Helew and Kassala localities, and in El Fashaga locality in El Gedaref state.

One of the affected residents complained to Dabanga that the dam complex management began flooding their lands without keeping to all its commitments towards the population of the area. “For instance, the farmers, herders, and shopkeepers at the markets in the areas have not been offered compensation for their losses until now.”

He called on “national and international organisations and the media to stand by those who are facing forced deportation in eastern Sudan”.

The official opening of the new dam complex is scheduled for September. More than 90 percent has been completed so far.

The combined generation capacity of the Rumela Dam on the Upper Atbara River and the Burdana Dam on the Setit (or Seteet) River will be 320 megawatts. The project is supposed to create more than ten million acres of new farmland to Kassala state and neighbouring El Gedaref state, at a cost $840 million, according to the dams chief engineer.

[Original source](https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/mass-deportation-starts-at-new-dam-sites-in-eastern-sudan)

Twin Dam in Eastern Sudan: Rumela Dam on Upper Atbara and Burdana Dam on Setit

The Dam Implementation Unit of Sudan is now building a dam complex comprising Rumela Dam at Upper Atbara River and Burdana Dam at Setit River in Eastern Sudan. The resident engineer of the twin dams, Mosab Mokhatar, said in December 2011 that the implemented work has reached 15% and that the foundation for the power generation station is under construction.

**Location**

The site of the twin dam is located 20 km upstream from the junction of the Atbara and Setit rivers and about 80 km to the south of the Khashm el-Girba Dam.

**Dam constructions**

The Rumela Dam on Atbara will have a height of 55 metres and the Burdana Dam on Setit will have a height of 50 metres. The two dams will be connected and have a total length of 13 kilometres. The twin dam complex will thus have a joined reservoir with a storage capacity of about 2.7 billion cubic meter of water. The maximum filling level will be 517,5 metres above sea level. The project includes the construction of hydropower stations on both Rumela and Burdana Dams with a total installed capacity of 135 MW, which should be capable of producing 380 GWh per year.

**Project aims**

The objective of the project is to support the development of Eastern Sudan, through enhancement of agriculture production, generation of hydropower and potable water utilizing locally available water resources from the Atbara and Setit rivers. The Project also aims to increase agriculture production in New Halfa area currently irrigated by Khashm El-Girba Dam, as well as, the development of new land consisting of 150,000 ha in Upper Atbara. Additionally, the Project will provide flood protection measures along the river banks through the regulation of the river flow in the Project area.

**Project costs**

The total cost of the dam complex is estimated at $ 1.9 billion, of which $ 838 million is for the construction of the dams by the two largest Chinese dam construction companies, the China Three Gorges Corporation (CTGC) and China Water and Electric Corporation (CWE).

In addition to the project implementation costs are hydroelectric and electric costs, technical and consultancy service costs, land owning and population resettlement costs and project implementation management and supervision costs by the Sudan Dams Implementation Unit (DIU). The consultant for the project is the French company Sogreah, which also designed and supervised the implementation of the Khashm el-Girba Dam during the 1960s. The Rumela and Burdana dam designs were revised by La Meer International Company, the same company that allegedly revised and supervised the design of the controversial Merowe Dam.

**Environmental Impact Assessment**

It is the French company Sogreah, part of the Artelia group, that has undertaken the environmental impact assessment studies that outline the environmental management plan and resettlement plan. They are also responsible for the environmental impact assessment for the irrigation scheme. These documents are not available online, but an e-mail requesting them have been sent to the company.

Any developer of dams should keep in mind the recommendations from the World Commission on Dams. The commission urges that before dams are built, the dam project needs to gain public acceptance and that dams should only be built if rivers and livelihoods are sustained (World Commission on Dams Report, 2000, p. 214).

**Feasibility**

Without an environmental impact assessment at hand, it is difficult to judge the feasibility of the project. However, we can learn from experiences of a former dam project on the River Atbara.

The Khasm el-Girba project: In 1964, a dam was built on Atbara in order to provide irrigation water for the Khashm el-Girba Agricultural Scheme as well as hydroelectricity. The agricultural scheme was developed partly for resettling Sudanese Nubians (whose land was flooded after the building of the Aswan High Dam that submerged 500 kilometres of the Nile Valley in Egypt and Sudan) and partly for nomads that were encouraged to become sedentary. However, the dam has not functioned as planned. Siltation and subsequent loss of storage capacity is now a well-known problem for dams on the Nile, with both economic and ecological implications. The reservoir behind the Khashm el-Girba Dam extends for 80 kilometres upstream. The annual siltation rate in the reservoir is estimated at 40 million m3 yearly, and the storage capacity of the dam was severely reduced only seven years after the dam was completed. For this reason, the reservoir has been flushed (i.e. completely emptied during the flood) annually since 1970. This is naturally causing mass mortality of fish. The original capacity of the dam was 1,3 billion m3, which has now been reduced to less than half with implications for both storing of irrigation water and electricity production. One of the aims of the new dam projects on Upper Atbara and Setit is to reduce the siltation of the Khashm el-Girba reservoir. It is thus appropriate to question if the building of these dams constitutes viable economic investments in terms of generating electricity and water storage for irrigation, or if their main function will be as silt traps for the Khashm el-Girba dam with short expected lifespans also for the new dams. Furthermore, the Khashm el-Girba Agricultural Scheme has not performed as expected and to the satisfaction of the investments that were made. Amongst the problems faced by the settlers have been low crop yields, insufficient water for irrigation, low revenues, shortage of fuel, machinery and spare parts, and rising production costs. The Nubian inhabitants of the scheme have not managed to attain a standard of living that is comparable or higher than the standard of living that they had before being resettled.

It is perhaps wise to make different investments in order to improve the living conditions for the underprivileged people of Eastern Sudan instead of another failed development project in the form of dams.

**Alternatives**

We therefore suggest abandoning plans for further dam building on the Atbara and the Nile, and rather turn to alternative means for producing electricity, like solar and aeolic energy, or power of the run-of-the-river. The storage of water for irrigation could be undertaken in deep wells next to the river. The benefits of the wells would be that they have small surfaces and thus are not loosing much water in evaporation in contrast to the dam reservoirs. At the end of the agricultural season, the wells could be emptied and the silt trapped in them could be extracted and used as fertilizers on the fields. These means of producing electricity and storing water should all be feasible and adapted to the fragile environment of eastern Sudan.

**Archaeology**

Archaeological surveys were undertaken in the area to be flooded by the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums during the summer of 2011.

**Timeline**

The US$ 838 million contract with the Chinese firms for building the dams was signed on 6 April 2010.

The Ground Breaking Ceremony of the main work of the dam complex took place on the project site on 18 November 2010. Mr. Mutaz Musa Abdalla Salim, Director General of DIU, Mr. Wolfgang Gantner, Chief Engineer of the consultancy firm, all project leaders, Chinese staff, and local employees participated. The construction period is expected to be around 5 years.

The signing of loan agreement of US$ 85 million with Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development on 22 December 2010.

A loan agreement of US$ 180 million was signed on 28 March 2011 between the Government of Sudan and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development to help finance the dams on the Upper Atbara and the Setit rivers.

On 24 February 2012 OPEC Fund for International Development signed a US$30 million public sector loan agreement with the Sudan to co-finance the Upper Atbara Dam Complex Project.

On 15 March 2012 Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development signed a second loan agreement of US$ 85, so the total amount of Kuwaiti funding is now US$ 170.

The dams are scheduled to be completed in March 2016.

[Original source](https://preservethemiddlenile.wordpress.com/2012/04/24/twin-dam-in-eastern-sudan-rumela-dam-on-upper-atbara-and-burdana-dam-on-setit/)