

Valerie Singleton for SOS Sahel UK

Let me transport you to the dry and dusty Sahel region of Africa, immediately south of the Sahara desert.

It is 8am in rural Kordofan in Sudan, and the temperature has already reached 20 degrees. Five months without rainfall has left the soil parched and Warshal village reservoir dangerously close to empty. Those living next to it anxiously guard the precious few litres of water remaining. They cannot afford to share it with nearby villages or wandering nomads, as they have done since time immemorial. There is simply not enough water to go round.

But desperate neighbours keep arriving, sparking fierce arguments. All now fear for their safety as well as their thirst. Sadly, this is how most conflicts in the Sahel region begin – over access to necessities that you and I take for granted. But there is hope.



SOS Sahel is a charity set up in response to the well-known African droughts of the 1980s. I have followed its progress now for twenty-four years. It continues to help communities achieve self-sufficiency and peace in a region better known for crises, and fortunately it manages to remain operational in Sudan as other charities are forced to withdraw.

Following a plea from the villagers of Warshal, SOS Sahel immediately employed a local engineer who re-designed the reservoir to trap enough water to last the entire dry season. More hand tools were provided, pipes and cement bought. The villagers contributed whatever money they could, in addition to hard labour and, of course, lots of enthusiasm. The nomads offered meat to feed the hungry workers, and these previously warring communities became partners, establishing a water committee to share maintenance into the future.

Villager Ahmed Ibrahim explains that his wife now needs only 15 minutes, rather than 6 hours, to fetch water. With this free time she makes grass mats to sell and ensures their five children get to school. Crucially, there has been no conflict since the reservoir was re-built.

Such quiet, effective work rarely gets a headline, which is why it needs your support. Just £15 could train a water committee like this one in another village in Sudan, building a foundation for lasting peace.

You can give now either online via the Radio 4 website or by calling 0800 404 8144, 0800 404 8144. Or, you can write a cheque to SOS Sahel (that's S-A-H-E-L), and send it to Freepost BBC Radio 4 Appeal, Freepost BBC Radio 4 Appeal. Please mark the back of your envelope SOS Sahel. Thank you.