



SUDAN PROJECT BRIEF

SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE GUM ARABIC PRODUCTION: ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

PROJECT OVERVIEW

NEF is helping farmers break the poverty cycle, fight climate change, and conserve natural resources through an innovative project that is building sustainability in Sudan's "Gum Belt."

Sudan is one of the leading global producers of gum arabic, a natural forest resource widely used in global markets as a stabilizer in products ranging from soft drinks to pharmaceuticals. Sudan exports roughly 50% of the world supply, an average 20,000 tons of gum annually.



Gum arabic, an exudate of the Acacia Senegal tree, is a common ingredient in consumer goods, from soft drinks to pharmaceuticals.

Gum arabic is primarily produced by small-scale farmers in traditional rain-fed areas of central and western Sudan (the "Gum Belt"). Gum arabic is the source of income for 1 in 5 people in Sudan (6 million people). Drought, desertification, civil war, and poverty are challenging Sudanese farmers and their ability to harvest gum arabic from the acacia trees that grow naturally in the region's harsh climate.

In Sudan, one of the poorest countries in the world, gum arabic is a rare and coveted income source but many farmers lack the simple tools and skills needed for sustainable harvesting. To survive in the short-term, Sudanese farmers use traditional harvesting techniques that do not yield the maximum amount of gum arabic from the tree (causing farmers to lose potential income). These techniques also have significant, negative long-term environmental and economic impacts. If they continue at the current rate, they may soon deplete the forest resource they rely upon for survival.

Location	Um Rawaba, North Kordofan
Timeframe	2010 - present
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 417 gum arabic farmers trained in forest management and sustainable harvesting techniques. 119 of those trained are women.• 100+ individuals benefited from microcredit funds; communities redistributing funds after repayment• 4 pilot villages have undertaken steps to establish protected forest areas, in coordination with pastoralists.• 257 hectares under improved natural resource management (protection, tree planting); 106 hectares of new land planted with Acacia trees.



STRATEGY

A Pilot Project to Improve Gum Arabic Production

To help build long-term sustainability of communities, gum arabic supply, and natural resources, the Near East Foundation (NEF) launched an innovative pilot project in Sudan's "Gum Belt" in 2010. Through this ongoing effort, NEF is helping farmers become better natural resource managers by providing training in water capture and storage techniques, more efficient tree harvesting, and general strategies to counter the impacts of drought and climate change. As a result, both gum producers and global markets benefit from increased supply, and forest cover expands in the region's dry forest ecosystem.

This project builds on NEF's 95 years of development work in the Middle East and Africa, and our enduring commitment to promote local enterprise through grassroots community-organizing and training in ecological sustainability. This strategy has proven one of the most effective ways to help vulnerable communities build peace and prosperity. We are currently preparing to expand this successful pilot project to other villages in the region.

Our approach is rooted in NEF's mission to increase:

- **Knowledge.** NEF provides training to Gum Arabic Producer Associations (GAPAs) in sustainable harvesting techniques, financial management, and microcredit fund management.
- **Voice.** NEF provides participants with the skills necessary to constructively express their needs and interests, supporting community associations in designing and implementing local natural resource management plans.
- **Enterprise.** NEF supports participants in developing their gum arabic production potential through microcredit funds.

Improving Production through Training

NEF has trained over 400 gum arabic producers in 4 villages in Um Rawaba, a region in North Kordofan State, in improved gum arabic cultivation techniques, financial management for producer associations, and microcredit fund management. The goal is to improve the management of natural forests while encouraging more systematic integration of gum-yielding acacia trees in agroforestry systems. In cooperation with North Kordofan State Ministry of Agriculture specialists, NEF's Natural Resource Management specialist makes frequent visits to field sites, and works closely with village members.



NEF-Sudan Natural Resource Management Specialist demonstrates improved gum-harvesting techniques to villagers in Um Rawaba.

Increasing Production through Microfinance

NEF has piloted micro-lending facilities for gum arabic producer associations to promote sustainability and give farmers access to the capital they need. Over \$10,000 has been lent to over 100 beneficiaries. Projects have focused on butane gas cylinder purchases or livestock development, both of which reduce pressure on forests. The model has been highly successful, with 100% repayment rates and re-lending of financial capital.



Sudan Sustainable Gum Arabic Production



Gum Arabic merchants in Um Rawaba play an important role in gathering gum to take to market.

Looking Forward

NEF is preparing to expand its successful pilot to additional villages in Um Rawaba, and other regions of Sudan. Planned future activities include:

- A partnership with the Agricultural Bank of Sudan to contribute to the project's microfinance component.

- The creation of a regional conflict management council to mitigate land management conflicts. This will be done in partnership with the North Kordofan State Ministry of Agriculture and Syracuse University's Maxwell School Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration.



Members of village gum arabic producer association in Um Rawaba discuss plans for planting Acacia trees. Behind them is a typical gum-producing Acacia grove.

The **Near East Foundation (NEF)** is a U.S.-based Non-governmental Development Organization. Founded in 1915, NEF has worked with vulnerable communities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region for almost one hundred years. Today NEF operates in Armenia, Egypt, Jordan, Mali, Morocco, Palestine and Sudan. NEF has worked in Sudan continuously since 1978 and is registered as an international NGO providing relief and development services. NEF has worked across Sudan on projects related to agriculture, livestock, microcredit small enterprise development, and health care.