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## Access to groundwater to unlock sustainable solutions for the Horn of Africa

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**Jigjiga, Ethiopia, 6-7 May 2024** – A new initiative called the Africa Groundwater Access Facility (GaFa) has been launched today to address water scarcity affecting millions in the Horn of Africa.

The Horn of Africa is a region characterized by significant water scarcity, resulting from a combination of factors including limited surface water, heavy reliance on inconsistent rainfall patterns, rapid population growth leading to overexploitation of water resources, and increasing climatic variability.

This scarcity transcends environmental issues, intersecting with public health, economic stability, and regional security. As demographic pressures escalate and climatic conditions grow more variable, the demand on our constrained water supplies intensifies. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires innovative solutions that extend beyond conventional water management strategies.

More than 40 million people are currently in humanitarian assistance in the region due to historic drought and floods.

Humanitarian assistance usually includes water trucking as the go-to solution for vulnerable communities without access to permanent water sources during emergencies. However, it is an unsustainable and expensive solution where communities rarely have the purchasing power and thus are dependent on aid.

To address this persistent challenge the GaFa will tap into the region's unexploited, millions of cubic km deep groundwater reservoirs as a sustainable development

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solution. The investment recognizes the central role of water in the lives and livelihoods of the Horn of Africa.

GaFa creates a platform for IGAD member states to collaborate on groundwater mapping, data sharing, and other related activities that bring development dividends for communities living in borderland areas.

The concept of the GaFa was recently presented during the sidelines of the 2023 UN Water Conference as a shared Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda. Investments in water, particularly the untapped wealth of groundwater, can be catalytic interventions, especially for borderlands where scarcity of resources is often a source of cyclical conflict for communities.

Several partners, including the World Bank, IFC, UNICEF, UNESCO, FAO, OCHA, and UNDP, are engaged with IGAD and member states on the GaFa initiative.

Borderlands in Africa are home to over 40 million people who face low infrastructure investments that cripple their capacity to weather increasingly severe, and more frequent, socio-economic and climatic shocks.

“QUOTE” – IGAD

“The Horn of Africa has been prone to droughts and floods in the past, but the frequency and severity have escalated in recent years making it almost impossible for millions of local communities in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, [Uganda](#), Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan to build back before the next shock hits. The impact is especially severe for already vulnerable children, with millions each year suffering physical and mental health, sometimes with long-term scars.” Mr. Daher Elmi, Director of Agriculture and Environment at IGAD, noted.

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“QUOTE” - UNICEF

UNICEF is working to ensure that vulnerable populations in the Horn of Africa have reliable and sustainable access to clean water through a multi-faceted approach. This includes drilling wells, implementing water management strategies, and equipping communities with the tools and knowledge to sustainably manage their water resources. By investing in groundwater infrastructure and capacity-building programs, UNICEF aims to alleviate water scarcity, improve health outcomes, and promote economic development in the region.

The formal launch of GaFa, a cross-border and cross-partner collaboration will kick in to invest in the proper feasibility analysis followed by the rollout of development projects in selected borderland areas of the Horn of Africa countries.

The initiative will scale up the knowledge around groundwater in the region by complementing ongoing groundwater [Management Information System \(MIS\)](#) systems with consolidating the available groundwater database. That knowledge will be used to explore, identify and develop private-public partnerships around climate-resilient groundwater investments for domestic use, enhancing livelihoods, and strengthening the agricultural and industrial sectors.

“QUOTE” - UNDP Borderland

“GaFa is poised to strengthen the resilience of our borderland communities, enabling them to thrive despite the climatic and economic challenges they face. This initiative not only provides immediate relief but also lays the groundwork for lasting peace and prosperity across the region,” says Zeynu Ummer, Manager, UNDP Resilience Hub for Africa.

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