



AFRICA

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Kenya aquifers discovered in dry Turkana region

A huge water source has been discovered in the arid Turkana region of northern Kenya which could supply the country for 70 years, the government says.

The discovery of two aquifers brings hope to the drought-hit region, tweeted Environment Minister Judi Wakhungu.

They were found in the Turkana Basin and Lotikipi Basin using satellites and radar.

Last year, scientists released a map detailing the vast reservoirs which lie under much of Africa.

Another aquifer was found in Namibia - sub-Saharan Africa's driest country.

Turkana is one of the hottest, driest and poorest parts of Kenya and was hit by a devastating drought last year.

Many of the region's inhabitants are nomadic herders, who are especially vulnerable to a lack of rain.

Test drilling confirmed there was water under the ground.

The discovery was announced by Ms Wakhungu at a meeting of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Unesco.

"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. We must now work to further explore these resources responsibly and safeguard them for future generations," she said.

'Irrigation and industry benefits'

The aquifers are said to hold some 250bn cubic metres of water.

Ms Wakhungu said Kenya currently uses about 3bn cubic metres a year.

"We're hoping with the two test boreholes, the water should be available within a month. The first priority is to supply water to the people of the area, who have always been water insecure."

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Using the water for irrigation and industry would also be considered, she said.

Massive oil deposits have also recently been discovered in Turkana.

The BBC's Angela Ng'endo in the capital, Nairobi, says despite its burgeoning wealth, the region's inhabitants have always felt marginalised.

Abou Amani, Unesco's Africa hydrologist, urged caution and said it was important not to "overexploit" the aquifers.

"We need to put in place a sound management system," he said.

The head of the non-governmental organisation Friends of Lake Turkana, Ikal Anglei, said the government also needed to engage more with local communities.

"Unfortunately they're not creating forums for us to engage with them," she said.

"It is critical for governments to realise they don't... come up with programmes without community ownership... and linking it to economic development."

According to Unesco, about 17 million of Kenya's 41 million people lack access to safe water.

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