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## Aquifers could supply Kenya for 70 years

Updated at 5:52 am today

The Kenyan government says that it has discovered a giant underground water supply that could meet the country's needs for decades to come.

Two aquifers under the arid north-western region of Turkana were identified using satellite technology and confirmed by drilling.

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

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

Another aquifer was found in Namibia - the continent'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.

### Prosperity

Test drilling confirmed there was water under the ground.

The discovery was announced by Environment Minister Judi Wakhungu at a meeting of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 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.

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

Ms Wakhungu said Kenya currently uses about 3 billion 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."

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 reports that despite its newly 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 aquifers are fed by underground streams running from distant mountains, so they should never run dry if properly managed.

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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