

# FROM EXODUS TO EMPOWERMENT:

## The Wad Balal Cattle Project in Sudan



A relentless heat envelops the plains of the vast Gezira state in southeastern Sudan, as the sun beats down from a cloudless sky day after day.

Nestled in the heart of this landscape is the once-thriving community of Wad Balal - now on an inspiring journey to rebuild hope and economic stability.

In the past, it was an agricultural hub, but declining opportunities had forced many to leave their ancestral homes in search of a better life. This exodus threatened the very fabric of the village, leaving behind a sense of despair and a yearning for a better future. The future of Wad Balal looked bleak – until a group of skilled and educated expatriates returned and devised a plan to revive their ailing home.

Shocked at witnessing the devastating consequences of economic hardship, they were determined to reverse a trend which had seen one in 5 villagers leave in search of work.

They embarked on a mission to build sustainable livelihoods for those remaining – weighing options on the kind of business venture that could sustain such lofty ambitions.

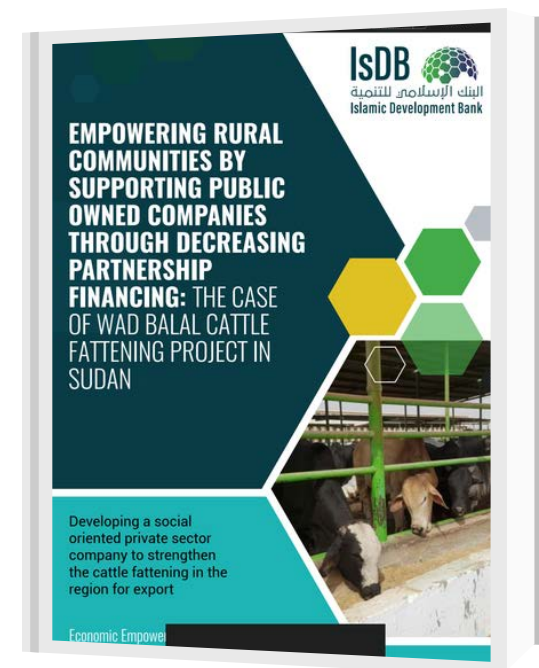
Their research revealed a promising opportunity: Sudan's potential to produce beef to meet the growing demand for meat in North Africa and the Middle East. They formed the "Wad Balal Cooperative Association" but understood that reviving the village economy required a collaborative effort. The expats approached one of the Islamic Development Bank's (IsDB) key strategic partners to seek financial and technical support - the Bank of Khartoum (BOK). Recognizing the project's potential for poverty reduction and rural development, the BOK readily agreed to participate. A unique partnership was formed, uniting the expertise and resources of the returning villagers, the financial assistance of the BOK, and the development experience of the IsDB.

The cornerstone of the Wad Balal project was the establishment of a local joint-stock company, the "Wad Balal Investment and Rural Development Company." Funded through a combination of equity from the expatriates and a diminishing Musharaka (decreasing partnership) financing model from the BOK, the company focused on two key areas: infrastructure development and capacity building.

The project prioritized the construction of modern livestock pens equipped with essential facilities for animal welfare and hygiene. Additionally, the company procured high-quality alfalfa feed to ensure optimal nutrition for the cattle.

Innovative and advanced herd management practices were incorporated. The company partnered with veterinary specialists to train local herders on proper animal care, disease prevention, and breeding techniques. This not only improved the overall health of the cattle but also led to increased yields.

From the outset, the project prioritized the active participation of the Wad Balal community. The returning villagers, who possessed a deep understanding of the local area, played a crucial role in mobilizing the community and ensuring their buy-in. Regular consultations were held to address concerns, gather feedback, and foster a sense of ownership among the villagers.



The Wad Balal project transformed the village in a remarkably short period. The modern cattle pens, coupled with improved herd management practices, led to a significant increase in the quality and quantity of livestock produced. This, in turn, translated into a steady stream of income for the participating herders.



Fatima Ali, a Wad Balal resident, said: "Before the project, life was very difficult. Now, thanks to the income from the cattle, I can afford to send my children to school and provide a better future for them."

The project not only delivered much-needed economic benefits but also instilled a renewed sense of hope and optimism within the community. Young people, who previously saw no future in Wad Balal, were inspired to stay and contribute to the village's development.

In addition, women were encouraged to take on active roles in managing the cattle and participate in other income-generating activities.

The success of the Wad Balal project is a powerful illustration of the transformative potential of collaborative partnerships, community engagement and innovative solutions.

It's a blueprint for empowering rural communities and fostering inclusive economic growth. It not only revived the fortunes of a struggling village but also inspired similar initiatives across Sudan. Now, the IsDB is working with local partners to explore the possibility of replicating this model in other regions, to harness agricultural potential and create sustainable development.