South Sudan, Poorest Countries Map for Development

Sudanese diaspora participate in a "mapathon," organized by the World Bank and Google, to document locations and infrastructure in South Sudan.

Information will help the new government of South Sudan plan development efforts.

The Bank's Mapping for Results platform visualizes project locations and provides information on indicators, sectors, funding and results for 79 of the poorest countries, including Sudan.

May 6, 2011—For many residents of South Sudan's remote Kajo-Keji county, getting proper medical care can require a two-day walk. Here, one hospital serves an entire region, and basic social infrastructure is largely unmapped. For public officials who want to improve access to care, better intelligence on both the locations of health facilities and underserved populations is desperately needed.

A recent "mapathon" of South Sudan, organized by Google and the World Bank Bank, as part of its new eTransform Knowledge Platform , was a first step in helping gather such information.

About 60 members of the Sudanese diaspora joined development and technology professionals in Washington, D.C. last week to plot better maps of the area, including roads, settlements, buildings and local businesses. Several hundred new locations, which were added to Google Maps during the four-hour event, will help a nascent South Sudan—slated to become the world's newest nation in July 2011—and its development partners better evaluate risks and needs.

The World Bank Group has played an important role in Sudan's development since 2005, and is deepening its engagement in South Sudan as it prepares for independence.

With last week's "mapathon" and ongoing efforts to map the region, the Bank is providing Southern Sudanese diaspora a chance to participate in the development of South Sudan from afar, using modern technology.

"With technology, we're able to leapfrog all the years that were lost," said Fareed Zein, a researcher who built Sudan Vote Monitor, a mapping platform that tracked votes during last January's referendum for independence. "Right now, we're getting the *before* picture so we're ready transform to the *after.*"

Aleem Walji, manager of innovation practice at the World Bank Institute, added that tapping into local communities is critical to making mapping for development effective. The movement has gained steam with the emergence of volunteer technical communities and platforms such as Ushahidi, CrisisCommons, OpenStreetMap and Random Hacks of Kindness. These groups have documented armed conflict, monitored election fraud and assessed the impact of natural disasters.

"Traditionally, you work with cartographic agencies to develop maps that take months or even years to publish. With innovations in geo-spatial tools and access to local knowledge and data gathered from people who know their communities best, maps can be created in near-real time that have real value" Walji said.

Each icon represents an active project site in the 79 poorest countries served by IDA. See project locations at maps.worldbank.org >>

Mapping for Results

The South Sudan event comes on the heels of the launch of the Bank's Mapping for Results platform, which visualizes Bank project locations worldwide and provides information on indicators, sectors, funding and results. Last month, the Bank announced completion of mapping for 79 of the world's poorest countries, which receive Bank assistance through the International Development Association.

The platform's geo-coded information covers more than 16,000 sub-national locations, for more than 1,200 active Bank activities deploying $76.9 billion in Bank-financed assistance. Information is drawn from Bank country teams and technical reports.

The maps, which are free and available to any public user, allow for comparison of project locations against development indicators. In one display, for example, a user can compare health projects against infant mortality in a given country. Such cross-referencing helps development professionals identify gaps and formulate questions about the location of future projects to maximize impact and reach those most in need.

Mapping for Results also aims to empower citizens and communities to participate in the development and implementation of Bank programs by establishing a direct feedback mechanism between citizens, government and donors.

That feedback loop can be especially empowering in a place like South Sudan, said Bank Vice President for the Africa Region Obiageli Ezekwesili, who spoke at last week's event. "This is about shifting the center of gravity from organizations to people, and empowering them to solve their own problems and develop their own solutions using maps," she said.