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Behind the Lancet report and pollution.org's alarming figures
Oil's pollution of water is killing South Sudan

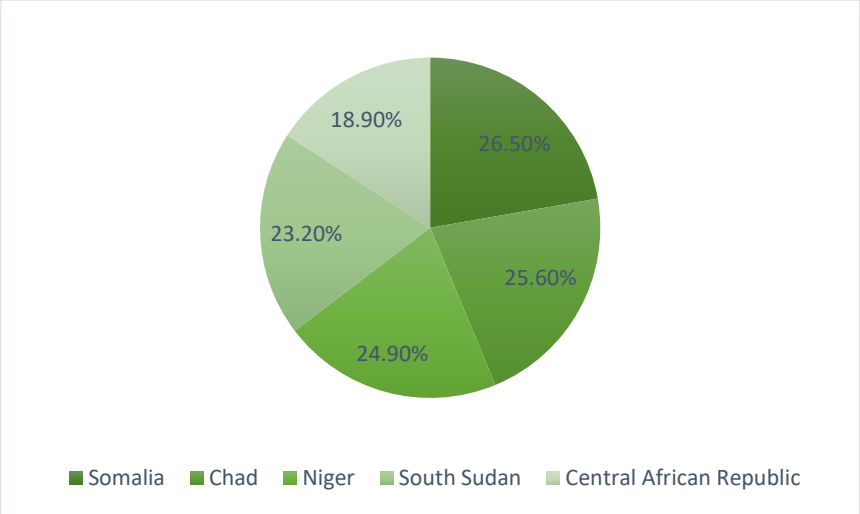
Summary:
Systematic, independent, long-term and in-depth research indicates that one major cause of South Sudan's among the worst-in-the-world health crisis is the poisoning of the country's groundwater by unscrupulous oil companies.

Pollution, health, and the planet: time for decisive action was published by the Lancet, one of the world's most respected medical journals, on October 19, 2017.

This report details the toll exacted by air, water and in situ pollution on human health. Its conclusion: this poisoning of our environment directly causes nine million "premature" deaths a year.

This makes pollution the number one killer of humans, according to the WHO. *http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs310/en/.* Pollution is thus more deadly than the world's wars, smoking, malnutrition and many other causes.

Pollution is most killing – when viewed on a per capita basis - in five countries in Africa. Number four is South Sudan.



Source: The Lancet

This would seem surprising. South Sudan lacks the dirty manufacturing facilities and dumps engendering and containing toxic agents that have earned other countries these high and unenviable rankings. Nor does South Sudan have the huge populations and the congested mega-cities in which they cluster found in other top placers.

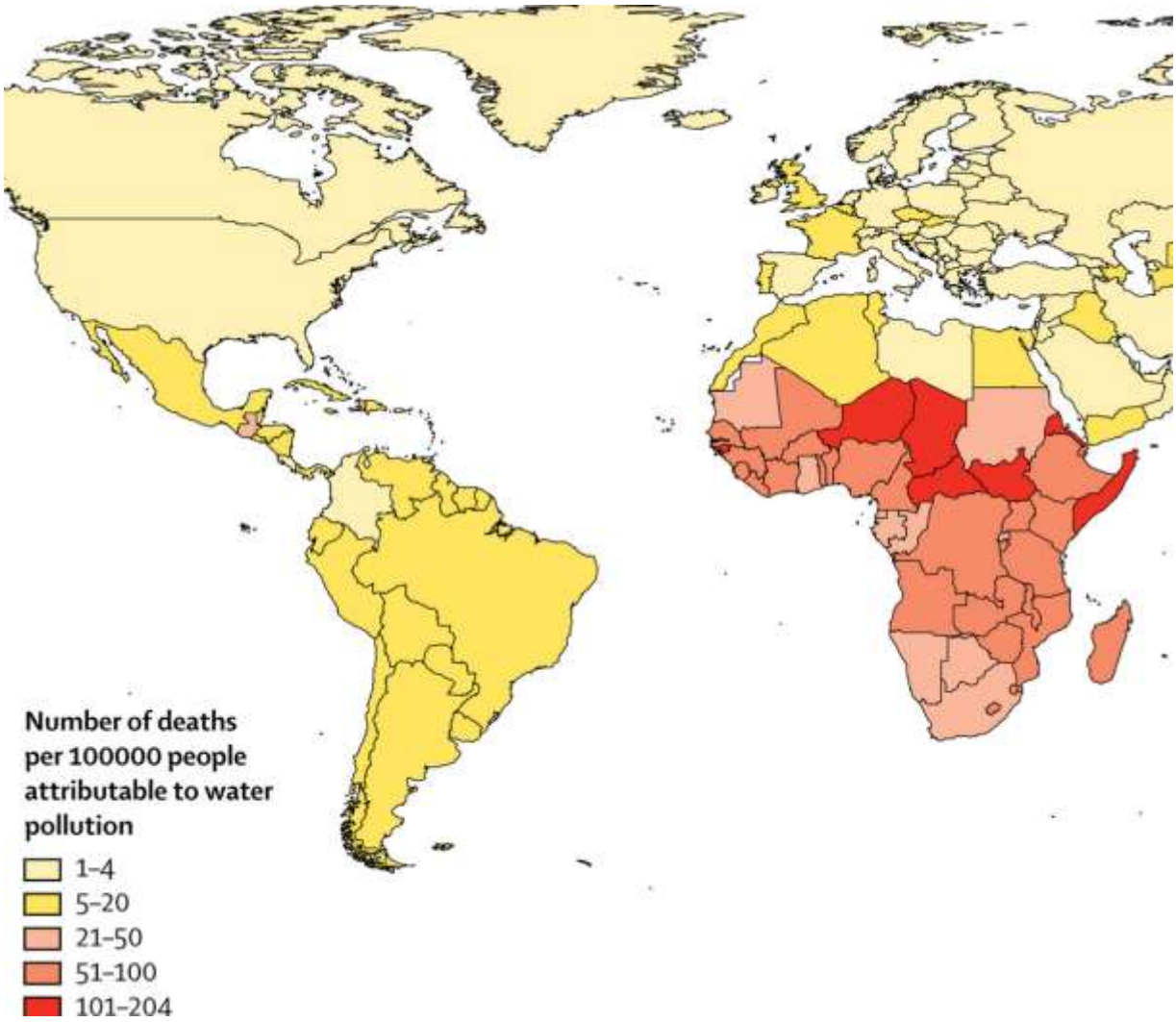
South Sudan does, of course, have oil. Lots of oil. At around 7 billion barrels, the country's reserves are the 20th largest in the world. Pumping of oil began in 1993, and peaked in 2005 at nearly 500,000 barrels a day. The ongoing civil war has reduced this down to a trickle – 130,000 barrels a day.

At October 11-12, 2017's South Sudan Oil & Power 2017 conference, the South Sudanese government announced plans to turn this around, and to ramp up production of oil to an unprecedented level. In early November, Nigeria's Otranto Petroleum started realizing these plans.

The company launched the development of a 24,415-square kilometer-large block believed to contain billions of barrels of oil

"Should these plans should be realized without fundamental adjustments and rethinking, we will be heading towards one of the biggest catastrophes for humankind and the environment. Its extent and severity would be similar to those of the oil catastrophe in the Niger delta", warns Klaus Stieglitz, human rights expert and deputy chairperson at the Konstanz, Germany-based Hoffnungszeichen Sign of Hope e.V.

To see what this Sign of Hope expert means by "one of the world's greatest disasters", take a look at the Lancet's reporting on fatalities due to water pollution worldwide:



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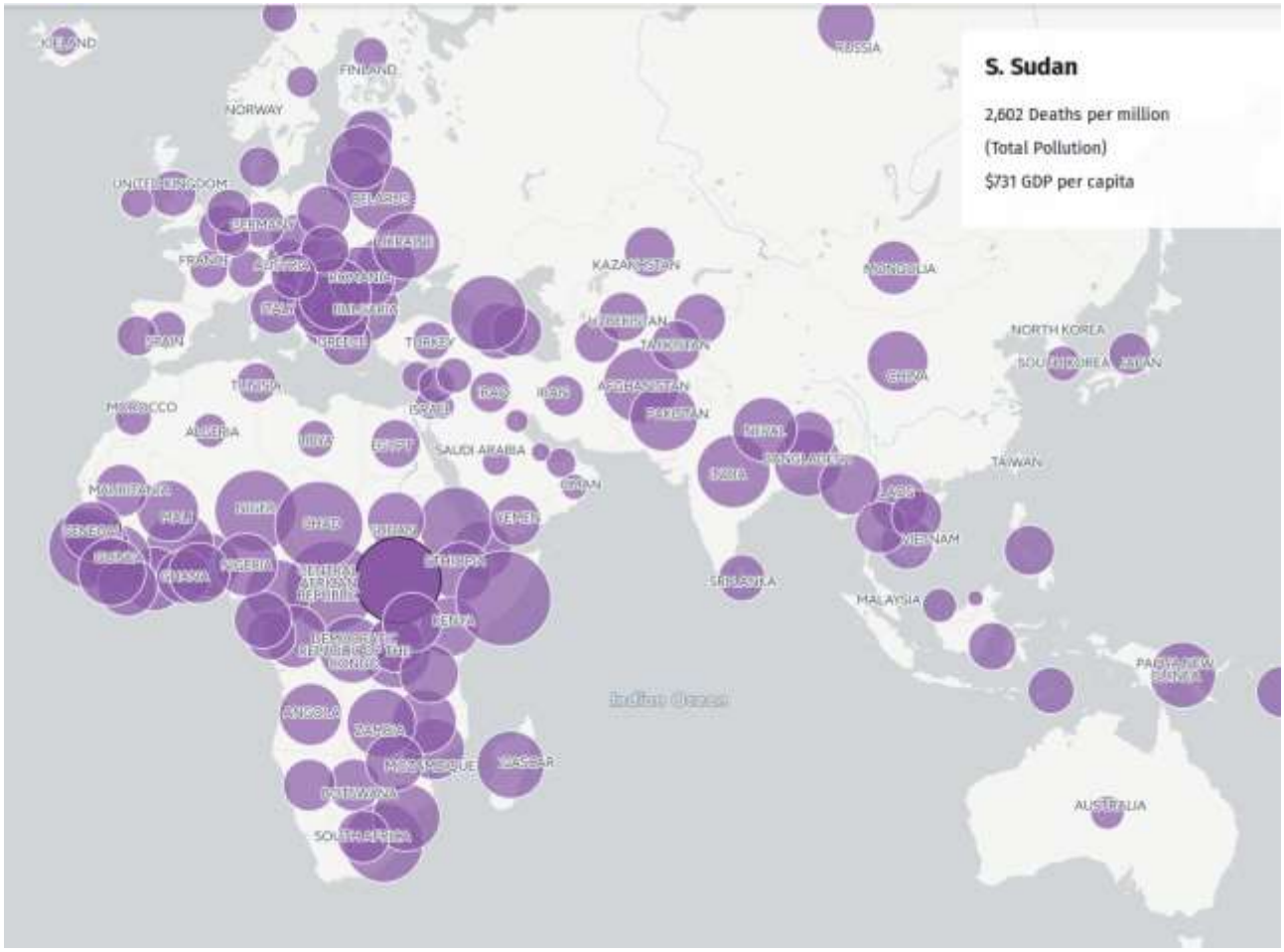

Source: Pollution.org

As it shows, water pollution is killing the South Sudanese at levels shared by only five countries in the world. Pollution.org (www.pollution.org) puts the number of water pollution-caused fatalities a year per one million inhabitantsin South Sudan at 2,602 – the fourth highest total in the world.

The question arises: what kinds of water pollution are killing the South Sudanese?

The answer came in "High concentrations of lead and barium in hair of the rural population caused by water pollution in the Thar Jath oilfields in South Sudan". Published on December 23, 2016, this study represented the final link in an eight-year chain of assembling evidence of this "crime against humanity and the environment", in the words of forsouthsudan.com.

The first link in the chain was the noticing of a marked deterioration in the health of residents who lived in the vicinity of Thar Jath. This deterioration was recognized by staff working at local clinics, who began treating residents for new, chronic and alarming severe ailments.

The next link was the determination of these patients' having something in common – consumption of water from local wells.

The third link was the gathering samples of water in the wells and from other sources in and around the Thar Jath field, which itself forms part of one of the five blocks of oil pumping and exploration in South Sudan. This collection of samples was commenced in 2008 by two Germany-based NGOs (Sign of Hope and African Water). The samples were then analyzed in independent laboratories of unimpeachable reputation. The labs' findings: the water was heavily contaminated with lead, barium and other heavy metals, salts and other noxious materials.

The final link was ascertaining whether or not local residents' bodies provided proof of their consumption of this contamination water. This proof took the form of the gathering of samples of the residents' hair.

These hairs were then tested and analyzed by scientists who are the recognized leaders in their fields. The scientists' findings, chronicled in the above-mentioned article, were clear and unequivocal. The patients' hair featured heavy concentrations of contaminants that could have only come from the wastes spewed by oil pumping operations.

This proof is of three-fold importance and urgency. This importance and this urgency stem from the magnitude of the crisis (so well described by the Lancet and by pollution.org) and of its prospective expansion, from the incontestability of the findings, and, as well, from their uniqueness.

To date, the tracking by Sign of Hope and African Water of Big Oil's poisoning of South Sudan's water remains the only project of its kind in the country.

And there is a very simple reason for this uniqueness.

As is the case with the journalists covering South Sudan's civil wars, famine, corruption and mass rapes, environmental investigators lead dangerous lives in the country. Sign of Hope and African Water themselves have been the objects of thinly-veiled and dire threats from governmental officials, of incarceration on trumped-up charges, and of other forms of harassment.

"The South Sudanese government's big plans for the country's oil industry join with the fact that our investigation covered only one of the country's many oilfields – albeit a large one – and was performed under challenging conditions in making it imperative for the world community to launch a comprehensive and independent survey of the groundwater in South Sudan and of the health of the people consuming it," summarizes Klaus Stieglitz.

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