Visitors to Rier, in southern Sudan, are welcomed by a large rectangular tank and a freshly-painted sign trumpeting the White Nile Petroleum Operating Company's initiative to supply drinking water.

But the inhabitants of this festering clutter of tumbledown straw huts and rubbish now complain that the promise of peace and progress has not been realised and that oil exploitation only poisoned their lives.

"When we were forced to move here, the oil company made many promises: building a school, building a hospital and providing drinking water," says local administration chief William Malual.

The small town of 2,000 was entirely moved in 2006 from an area a few miles away in Unity state that was requisitioned by WNPOC, a subsidiary of Malaysian oil giant Petronas, for building a central processing facility.

"Now people are falling sick and we don't know why. The livestock is dying abruptly because of all these chemicals in the water," says Malual, wearing threadbare black clothes and carrying a Kalashnikov.

"We are very suspicious of the water quality in the region," says Unity state's representative from the health ministry, Peter Majuoy.

Refilling by oil company trucks of the proud steel tank donated by WNPOC is erratic at best and new findings by the German NGO Sign of Hope shows alarming water contamination by salts and heavy metals.

In the filthy alleys of "New Rier", six-foot-tall women with jet-black skin from the local Nuer tribe spend much of their days carving their way through cesspools and waste with jerrycans balanced on their heads to retrieve every drop of WNPOC's chlorine-treated water.

Nobody uses the water from the old wells and boreholes, which Sign of Hope says is packed with cyanides, lead, nickel, cadmium and arsenic and even the local oil company representative admits is unfit for consumption.

"This pump, we never use it," says Martha Nyaluk, pursing her lips in disgust as she points to a rusty fountain near her family shack, over which a cloud of mosquitoes blackens the air.

"Everybody is suffering because of this contaminated water. We no longer use it, not for cooking, not for laundry, not even to wash," says Malual.

Rier is a stretch of grimy stalls made of logs, corrugated iron and recycled tarp marked "potassium chloride".

A gutted mini-bus lies on its side, a zombie-like prisoner roasts inside a container-cum-prison cell and children play boisterously around old WNPOC-stamped barrels despite the stench of human excrement.

In the background, the ominous red and white striped chimneys of the Thar Jath oil processing facility dominate the flat landscape of the Sudd wetlands, a UN-protected site of swamps and flood plains covering 11,000 square miles.

Rier has not had it easy in recent decades. Its name still conjures up some of the most violent chapters of the civil conflict that tore Africa's largest country apart for 22 years.

The interminable ribbon of laterite soil leading to the village used to be known as the "blood road" for the thousands of pro-Khartoum forces that came scudding down it before rampaging through nearby villages.

The civil war killed an estimated 1.5 million people and officially ended in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which hinges largely on an oil revenue sharing agreement.

Now along the "blood road" runs a pipeline which pumps crude to the north for refining and exporting.

But the inhabitants of Rier see nothing heading back to them of the riches they feel their soil is affording to the northern regime.

"We read a lot about the sharing of oil wealth but we see nothing coming... Life was much better before," says Malual.

Reverend Roko Taban Mousa -- an influential cleric in the oil-producing regions of Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei -- agrees that the benefits generated by Sudan's booming oil industry are not trickling down to the producing areas.

"I see nothing coming out of the oil," he says. "The region where the oil is produced is still the poorest in the country."

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