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SUCCESS STORY

Training Inspires Journalists to Foster Peace

Media workers learn how to report effectively in a post-conflict society



Photo: Pact Sudan/Danielle Botti

These journalists from a local radio station were among the participants in the “Media for Peace” training in Juba, Sudan.

“This training has taught me the importance of neutrality,” said one participant in a media training in Sudan aimed at reducing ethnic and religious tensions.

Between 1982 and 2005, a bitter civil war between Northern and Southern Sudan further widened the rifts among the diverse religious and ethnic communities in the country’s south. The end of the war and the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 brought a wave of new beginnings and freedoms for Southerners — political, social and economic.

Because the media have been identified as facilitators in the peace building process, USAID funded a “Media for Peace” training in Juba for 21 media representatives from southern Sudan. The training was designed to equip the journalists with skills to report in post-conflict situations.

Journalists learned how to handle the effects of hate speech through accurate reporting and minimizing misrepresentations, which can spur tensions. The training also stressed the importance of developing and crafting news articles that are sensitive to the issues intrinsic to any conflict, and outlined how to interpret and respond to “early warning” conflict indicators and reports. Participants, particularly radio journalists, honed skills on how to appeal to a socially diverse audience when discussing contentious issues, aiming to harmonize all views to create an open forum for discussion. Field visits made during the training were practical and hands-on, with participants teaming up to explore potential news stories within Juba and apply their newly learned skills. The culmination of these activities was the presentation of the news articles, which were then subjected to peer critique during the workshop and later aired on radio or printed in their respective newspapers.

Appollonia Matia has been writing for 10 years with *Juba Post*, a daily newspaper in the Southern Sudanese capital, but had little training on conflict sensitive reporting. Previously her articles had attracted criticism from her readers for being tribally biased, but her style has changed since the training. “I was critiqued on the way my writing highlighted the ethnicity issues in the stories I covered. The training revealed the importance of being conflict sensitive. I now focus on the main points in the story and not on tribal issues,” she said.