



SUCCESS STORY

Promoting Peace through Art and Culture



Sudanese children display artwork from a peace messaging workshop in Khartoum.

USAID/OTI supported the efforts of a group of female artists to increase the participation of women and youth in the promotion of fundamental freedoms embodied in Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

April 2008 – Recognizing the right to freedom of expression as an essential component of peace and democracy, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) is supporting the efforts of Sudanese artists to contribute to the country's post-conflict dialogue. Last year, USAID/OTI funded a grassroots initiative to engage children in the capital of Khartoum in the dissemination of peace messages through artistic media. After participating in a workshop to broaden their understanding of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), 19 professional artists worked with 60 school-age children to use art as a tool for promoting peaceful coexistence. The artists and children came from different ethnic and religious backgrounds and worked individually and collectively to create paintings and sculptures for an exhibit that showcased Sudan's

tremendous diversity.

The project was spearheaded and coordinated by a group of young female artists – a significant feat in a country where men dominate most aspects of public life and where women face social and cultural constraints that limit their freedom of expression. Initial success inspired the grantee to turn the artists' temporary venue into a permanent space to support Sudanese art and culture. The arts center, which is the first of its kind in Sudan to be founded and directed by a woman, has achieved remarkable success. Since March 2007, the center has hosted dozens of events, including workshops, exhibits, cultural activities, and dance performances. In addition, occasional film screenings at the center provide a unique opportunity for dialogue on contemporary social and political issues affecting Sudan. Artists are able to use the center's gallery free of charge, and the work of female and young artists is frequently featured in rotating exhibits. The center is also helping internally displaced women in Khartoum's squatter settlements by providing a market outlet for their traditional handicrafts.

In addition to bringing Sudan's devastating north-south civil war to an end, the CPA granted unprecedented civic and political rights to the country's citizens. Yet more than three years after the signing of the CPA, women and youth continue to have only limited access to the public forums where implementation of the agreement is discussed. USAID/OTI supports the efforts of civil society to popularize the freedoms embodied in the CPA and give marginalized groups a voice in the transition process.