



## SUCCESS STORY

### Youth Use Forum Theatre To Promote Positive Change in Darfur



*Darfurian youth stage a play on gender-based violence in the Forum Theatre style. The interactive method enlists the audience to suggest alternative responses to the situations depicted.*

*By supporting a Forum Theatre training activity, USAID/OTI enhanced the ability of 27 Darfurian youth to use their acting talents to promote peace.*

**November 2007** – Censorship has curtailed many opportunities for citizens to engage in public debate on issues that are central to daily life in the war-torn region of Darfur. In particular, the suppression of conventional media outlets has left many human rights abuses undocumented and stories of oppression untold.

Building upon the respected Darfurian tradition of employing theater to stimulate social change, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) recently supported the training of young actors in the method of interactive drama known as Forum Theatre. Professionals from a university in Khartoum traveled to South Darfur to train 27 youths in the performance style through which actors introduce a divisive scenario on stage and consult the audience to formulate a just outcome.

During the training, the youth learned to deconstruct the traditional actor-audience relationship and facilitate a dialogue process to promote peace and respect for human rights. On the final day of the training, the youth staged original skits for an audience of family, friends, and community members. One of the productions addressed tribal conflict, another examined the importance of effective leadership in resolving conflicts, and another questioned harmful traditional practices such as female genital cutting and early marriage. The controversial scenarios were debated and alternative courses were suggested. Following the productions, the actors encouraged the audience members not only to imagine change but also to create it.

Exposure to the internationally renowned performance style has had a profound effect on the youth, as it has improved their capacity to become agents of change in their communities. Several of the theater troupes to which the participants returned are now using Forum Theatre to discuss and challenge discrimination and abuse in South Darfur. One troupe has nearly finished producing six plays that will be performed in markets, schools, and camps for internally displaced persons. Other troupes plan to stage Forum Theatre performances at the theater in Nyala, South Darfur, when it reopens later this year following USAID-funded renovations.

As part of its initiative in Sudan, USAID/OTI supports creative activities that promote dialogue on the protection of vulnerable groups.