



SUCCESS STORY

Artists' Network Addresses Sexual Violence in Darfur



An artist paints a work that promotes awareness of sexual violence.

USAID/OTI provided catalytic support to a new artists' network in North Darfur that will use a variety of cultural media to address sexual violence.

December 2007 – Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has become endemic in Darfur, as the conflict has brought rape and crimes against women to camps for the displaced, rural areas, villages, and towns. To compound the problem, cultural conventions make it difficult for victims, their families, and community members to talk about sexual violence and develop ways to address its impact on the community.

Within this context, a network of 40 artists in North Darfur has initiated a project to leverage the use of traditional artistic media to address sensitive topics, including SGBV and harmful traditional practices. To increase the capacity of the artists to break the silence surrounding

these issues, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) provided the artists with training on a rights-based approach for addressing sexual violence. During the training, a seven-day workshop at a local human rights center, the artists developed paintings, drawings, songs, and dramas to explore these sensitive subjects.

Following the workshop, the center hosted a festival to showcase the artists and their work to community leaders, university students, and internally displaced people. Festival performances were recorded and distributed to the community on CDs. The network also staged performances every day during Ramadan, not only entertaining but also informing the audiences, including representatives from local cultural organizations, about SGBV issues. The festival and Ramadan performances, which were highlighted in an interview with a Nyala radio station, have spurred requests for more events, particularly in camps for the internally displaced. In addition, the visual artists are compiling their works in an album and will distribute 1,000 copies to groups in Darfur. They will also exhibit their paintings and drawings at local venues.

Connecting Darfurian artists and human rights advocates in ways that help mitigate the effects of SGBV is one means by which USAID/OTI seeks to combat violence against women and other vulnerable groups in Darfur.