



## SUCCESS STORY

### Center a Safe Haven for Youth and Women in Contested Darfur Town



*The rehabilitated center in Finna in the remote region of Jebel Marra, an area that has seen vicious fighting during the Darfur conflict.*

*USAID/OTI funded the rehabilitation of Finna's youth and women's center and now supports literacy classes attended by more than 300 community members.*

**October 2007** – Since the onset of the Darfur conflict in 2003, the small town of Finna in the Jebel Marra region of Sudan has absorbed more than 10,000 Fur villagers fleeing their homes. Bombing campaigns against rebel strongholds have made the mountainous region one of the most difficult areas for humanitarian agencies to access, compounding the sense of marginalization that residents have felt for decades as a result of neglect by the Sudanese government. Youth and women, in particular, have been deeply affected by the conflict. As violence has increased, the fear of being assaulted has forced many women off the streets and out of public life. Young men have grown frustrated and disillusioned as employment and educational opportunities have disappeared, and many have turned to participation in armed movements.

One way USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) aims to protect Darfur's vulnerable and marginalized populations is through the empowerment of youth and women in neglected, rural communities. With that goal, OTI recently funded the rehabilitation of a dilapidated youth and women's center in Finna. The town's citizens came together to develop a unified vision for the center and to establish a committee to oversee its management. The center, now open daily, consists of two large buildings, as well as a library, storeroom, and shelter. One of the buildings is used for youth and the other is set aside for women. The center provides a safe place where women can find psycho-social support and where survivors of sexual assault and other war-related atrocities can regain confidence.

The center's management committee is currently identifying volunteers to conduct awareness sessions on peer counseling, women's rights, and health education. OTI is supporting the center's first three months of Arabic literacy and basic English classes with funding for teachers' stipends and teaching materials. After one month of operation, more than 300 people are attending classes at the center. Furthermore, the number of students is likely to grow once the installation of a solar-powered electrical system is complete. The system will provide lighting that will facilitate night classes for men, community meetings, and other activities.