



SUCCESS STORY

Democracy Library and Book Forums Expand Public's Horizons



More than 1,000 new books and journals on human rights, peace building, and civic education have been made available to the public in Khartoum.

Professors have commented that the library collections funded by USAID/OTI are richer with literature on peace and democracy than all of Khartoum's universities combined.

September 2007 – Although the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) laid the foundation for democratic transformation in Sudan, much of the public remains uncertain of its content. Many Sudanese are disillusioned by the country's recent political history, while others, particularly young people, have known nothing beyond the current regime's narrow ideology. Educational institutions have suffered under the regime's campaign to weaken democratic traditions, with syllabi censored to limit students' exposure to texts on democratic systems and theories.

To enhance open access to resources on peace building, human rights, and civic education, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) recently funded the expansion of library collections housed in two of Khartoum's cultural centers. Collectively, more

than 1,000 books, journals, and magazines were purchased, together with audio-visual materials. The centers are frequented by 800 to 1,200 visitors a month, most of whom are youth from Khartoum's universities and colleges. As a result of the new collections, students, researchers, and professors from various disciplines, ethnic backgrounds, and political affiliations are visiting the libraries to access the new resources and discuss issues affecting the future of Sudan.

A series of public events were organized to promote the new resources and to strengthen the centers as platforms for public dialogue. Large audiences gathered for book club meetings, lectures, public forums, and film screenings. Students, journalists, civil society activists, and staff from nongovernmental organizations, U.N. agencies, and embassies joined together to listen to well-known writers and politicians discuss peace and conflict in Sudan and the future of the CPA. The presentation in Khartoum by Abel Alier, former Vice President of Sudan, on "Too Many Agreements Dishonored" drew more than 300 people to the forum, including many southern Sudanese. The audience's genuine interest and enthusiasm led to memorable discussions.

By improving access to knowledge and providing youth with platforms for sharing ideas, USAID/OTI aims to strengthen civil society's ability to advocate for the CPA and the democratic transformation it outlines.