USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

OFFICE OF TRANSITION INITIATIVES

15 YEARS
1994–2009

Cover photos from top to bottom: OTI/Sudan; OTI/Iraq; OTI/Afghanistan

OFFICE OF TRANSITION INITIATIVES: 1994–2009

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

EVOLUTION 5

METHODOLOGY 9

PARTNERSHIPS 19

INITIATIVES 21

LEGACY 31

MAPS 35

OTI/Afghanistan

" Windows of opportunity—brief, critical junctures in a nation's history in which the actions of citizens and public servants can lead directly to either peaceful political development and stability or backsliding into further conflict and crisis—tend to be fleeting."

INTRODUCTION

Since it was created 15 years ago, the USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) has grown from a small experimental office managing $10 million in program funds in two countries to an office managing $100 million in program funds in 10 to 12 countries a year.

OTI MISSION STATEMENT:
To support U.S. foreign policy objectives by helping local partners advance peace and democracy in priority countries in crisis. Seizing critical windows of opportunity, OTI works on the ground to provide fast, flexible, short-term assistance targeted at key political transition and stabilization needs.

OTI programs specialize in quick-impact opportunistic interventions designed to create or preserve political space and help set the stage for more profound longer-term change. With a focus on the short-term political context, OTI programming differs from traditional development through its operational modality, wide geographic presence, flexible resources, tactical approaches, and unique organizational culture.

OTI often enters countries on the cusp of change before traditional development programs can take hold. By generating positive momentum through an array of high-visibility activities, OTI programs provide tangible benefits of peace and buy time for longer-term political and economic reforms.

Although in recent years the world has witnessed fewer major conflicts between nations, fragile states are increasingly threatened by destabilizing forces that draw on extremism, ethnic tensions, poverty, and child combatants. Local conflict undermines their economic, political, and social development. Their internal instability threatens neighboring states and provides opportunities for extremism to grow and spread, threatening the entire world community.

Indeed, the events of 9/11 made it clear that unstable states can serve as incubators for extremist movements that can export terrorism well beyond a country's borders. U.S. foreign policy has given top priority to fighting terrorism and extremism and has intensified efforts to tackle core issues of fragile states that, left unaddressed, could directly threaten U.S. interests around the world.

When OTI was created in 1994, the challenges facing the world were very different. The end of the Cold War coincided with an outbreak of local conflicts brought on by ethnic tensions, nationalist movements, and long-simmering tribal and religious hostilities. In the 1990s, historical enmities were reignited. The decade saw a resurgence of bloody localized wars character-

OTI/Nepal

ized by widespread atrocities, massive population displacements, state collapse, and economic disintegration.

In many regions today, the threats to peace are increasingly complex. Extremism has spread in parts of the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. Higher food and fuel prices have raised tensions and further constrained economic opportunity. Armed combat is more likely to be carried out by insurgent groups than by states, and often unarmed civilians are the victims. The large numbers of persons displaced by conflict increase the burden on local authorities to provide basic needs and further exacerbate the inability of weakened governments to stabilize, develop, and prosper.

Unaddressed, threats to stability and peace pose significant challenges to longer-term development. Yet even where there is instability and violence, there are always local agents of positive change whose efforts can be amplified by creative application of assistance. OTI was established in 1994 to bolster these positive change agents at critical junctures of a transition, engaging in countries in crisis during brief windows of opportunity and getting resources to those promoting peace and democracy. With 47 engagements in 40 countries and over 14,000 grant activities in 15 years, OTI has helped hundreds of thousands of people engage in individual efforts, community action, and national movements to bring about positive change and increase their chances for a stable and peaceful future.

OTI's mission and vision directly link helping local partners with larger U.S. foreign policy objectives:

> *To support U.S. foreign policy objectives by helping local partners advance peace and democracy in priority countries in crisis. Seizing critical windows of opportunity, OTI works on the ground to provide fast, flexible, short-term assistance targeted at key political transition and stabilization needs.*

With foreign policy increasingly focusing on conflict, stability, and fragile states, OTI contributes to this larger government effort through expanded application of its programming methodology on the ground and through engagements with country Missions and other government counterparts to better plan and conceptualize innovative activities that address core causes of conflict. With 15 years of experience and having managed $1.3 billion in programs, OTI has directly contributed to more cohesive and operational approaches for USAID and the U.S. Government (USG), and to the building of a common organizing to framework and strategy to programming in conflict, crisis, and fragile states.

OTI's mission is essentially political and short-term rather than humanitarian or developmental. It uses its tools to preserve political space and advance positive change in the midst of political transitions. OTI identifies issues that positively influence the transition and funds activities that spark or reinforce broad-based change. These themes are reflected in its programs—from combating violence against women through local civil society groups in Darfur to weakening insurgency by employing tens of thousands of people in Iraq; from helping traditionally excluded indigenous communities participate in electoral processes in Bolivia to combining humanitarian relief with ethnic reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Fifteen years after its creation, OTI remains a relatively small office within USAID, using less than one half of 1 percent of the entire USAID budget. Yet it plays a crucial role in meeting foreign policy objectives in critical countries experiencing a cessation from conflict, political transition, or a sudden break from past tyranny.

LESSONS IN TRANSITION PROGRAMMING: 1994–2009

- Coordination within USAID and with other U.S. Government agencies is critical to success.
- A country's own political will for transition is key. OTI interventions cannot create it or substitute for its absence.
- Working in dynamic political environments requires equally dynamic and adaptive performance management processes.
- In countries prone to ethnic violence, programs often must be tailored to local realities and target strategic regions outside capital cities, where conflicted communities are more frequent and central governments have less control.
- Support "action research" and don't commit rigidly to a single strategic course. Constantly re-visit initial assumptions, re-evaluate program objectives, and re-target when necessary.
- Look beyond the "usual suspects" for local partnerships, including spontaneous groups of active citizens that can often be more energized and effective.
- Seize windows of opportunity to support local actors to advance peace and democracy, but recognize that creative initiatives are made more effective through sustained effort and support.
- Empower field personnel to make on-the-spot program decisions, which enables quick, responsive, and relevant interventions at the local or regional level, but also demands logical, defensible strategic rationales for proposed actions.
- Funding flexibility and staff deployment-readiness are essential for quick program startups.
- Top-down approaches to democracy and peace are inherently fragile. Support for enlightened leadership must be complemented by grassroots efforts to build stakeholders among the general population.
- The process is as important as the product. Every project is an opportunity to put democratic principles into practice and achieve positive change in public perceptions about a country's political transition.
- Assume a "venture capitalist" approach where appropriate by starting small, taking risks, and growing good ideas. Building synergy across activities and regions can produce catalytic results.

Jose Azel/Aurora Photos

" By keeping individual grants small — typically $5,000 to $50,000 — OTI limits the exposure and risk of each activity."

EVOLUTION

" One of the results of the change in the nature of conflict over the past decade or so has been the creation…of new programs and bureaus to manage the complicated and still little understood tasks of helping countries emerging from crisis and conflict with reconstructing political institutions and social reconciliation. USAID, in its major innovation of recent years, was the first to create such a program, housed in the new Office of Transition Initiatives."

—Transforming Foreign Aid
by Carol Lancaster, 2000

FROM IDEA TO INSTITUTION

Traditional USAID missions did not always possess the tools, flexibility, or institutional culture to effectively respond to complex post-Cold War challenges. A lengthy budgeting cycle, tightly focused earmarked budgets, and a procurement system not well suited to crisis response made it extremely difficult for the Agency to find even small amounts to respond quickly and flexibly to political crises in developing countries. Moreover, within an institutional culture that saw the Agency as a technical organization, many in USAID questioned the kind of opportunistic, short-term, and often overtly political activities that OTI employs to preserve the peace in a postconflict environment.

Lawrence Eagleburger, Secretary of State under President George H.W. Bush, however, recognized that such activities are critical to USAID's survival. As he left office in 1993, Eagleburger urged USAID to find ways to move more quickly to address foreign policy priorities and stay relevant to national security decision-making. Thirty years earlier, Eagleburger had created the impetus for establishment of the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) when he urged the U.S. Government to improve its capacity to respond to natural disasters.

Incoming USAID Administrator Brian Atwood, who served under President William Clinton, was already familiar with the difficulties USAID faced in addressing post-communist transitions and rose immediately to the challenge. In August 1993, three months after his confirmation, Atwood sent to Capitol Hill a proposal for a USAID Office of

Crisis and Transition Management. Its mission would be to respond to urgent, short-term requirements that humanitarian relief, peacekeeping operations, and long-term development programs were ill-equipped to address, such as simple confidence-building initiatives, conflict mitigation, reconciliation and reintegration of demobilized combatants, restoration of basic infrastructure, and the promotion of civil society and electoral reform. To carry out these activities, the Administrator proposed a special crisis-waiver authority as well as core funding and staff.

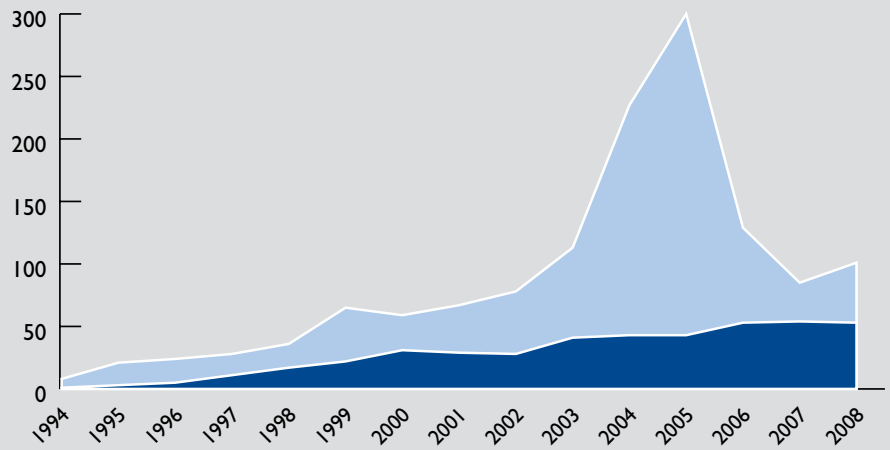
In response, Congress approved the inclusion of language allowing OFDA funds to be used for "reconstruction" and added $10 million to OFDA's budget for "transition" activities in the next fiscal year. This was the first step toward the creation of the Office of Transition Initiatives. The first year of funding was used to launch programs in Haiti and Angola.

THE EVOLUTION OF TRANSITION PROGRAMMING

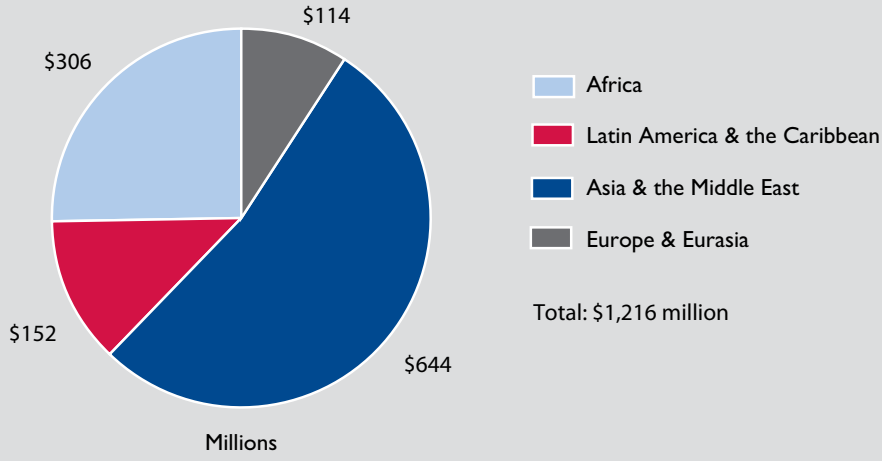
A group of five political transition pioneers drew up OTI's first strategic plan, hired a handful of staff, and conducted assessments in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Angola, Liberia, and Haiti. The plan defined the four criteria for engagement, which remain in place today:

- Is the country important to U.S. national interests?
- Is there a window of opportunity?
- Can OTI's involvement significantly increase the chances of a successful transition?
- Is the operating environment sufficiently stable?

OTI Growth: 1994 to 2008
Program Funds and Staffing Levels



OTI Funding by Region: 1994 to 2008



With the OTI mission of bringing "fast, direct, and flexible assistance to the acute needs of priority nations emerging from political, economic, and/or social distress," the new office moved quickly, launching its transition programs in Angola and Haiti in 1994.

Over the next six years, through 2000, funding managed by OTI grew from

OTI/Sudan–Darfur

$10 million to over $60 million a year, funded by OFDA and other accounts. Funding for OTI programs expanded quickly as the U.S. Government increasingly targeted conflict and post-conflict priorities. In FY 2001, congressional appropriators established a separate "Transition Initiatives" budget line item, for the first time providing specific statutory authority for transition activities. Transition Initiatives (TI) funds may be used to:

> *"support transition to democracy and long-term development of countries in crisis,"* including *"assistance to develop, strengthen, or preserve democratic institutions and processes, revitalize basic infrastructure, and foster the peaceful resolution of conflict."*

One misperception of OTI among development specialists is that its programs are fast and flexible only because of the "notwithstanding any other provision of law" authority that comes with TI funding. OTI uses notwithstanding authority very rarely, and non-TI funding that carries no special authority (such as the Economic Support Fund) has been the predominant source of program funding for OTI in the past several years.

While the TI budget line is subject to budget constraints and evolving foreign policy priorities, it has generally ranged from $40 to $50 million since 2001, supporting programming in 10 to 12 priority countries each year. In addition to its own TI budget, OTI receives funds from other accounts, such as Development Assistance, Economic Support Funds, the U.S. Department of Defense's 1207 authority, and special supplemental appropriations. Such transfers have at times more than tripled OTI's core program budget. For example, the large supplemental appropriation for Iraq in FY 2004 brought OTI's total budget that year to $226 million. Although these funds come with restrictions that do not apply to TI funding, the fact that they can be used for OTI activities demonstrates that funding type alone does not define programming possibilities in conflict and postconflict settings. In total, OTI has programmed over $1.2 billion in TI and non-TI funds since 1994.

Izzet Keribar/IML/Aurora Photos

" People in postconflict countries often have high hopes and little confidence, or high expectations and little patience."

METHODOLOGY

" In order to facilitate sustainable security, planners and executors alike need to be able to get at the root causes of the conflict at hand, properly define the mission, and continually evaluate progress.…Planning should reflect the unpredictable nature of conflict."

—Joint DARPA and CSIS Workshop on Pre- & Post-Conflict Stability Operations, 2004

POLITICAL TRANSITION PROGRAMMING

Fifteen years of programs in postconflict, transitional, and stabilization environments have shown that people in postconflict countries often have high hopes and little confidence, or high expectations and little patience. Invariably, national and local governments, hampered by the effects of prolonged conflict, lack full capacity to meet the basic needs of the population, and the higher expectations of the population inevitably lead to disappointment. Such states in transition are inherently fragile. Windows of opportunity—brief, critical junctures in a nation's history in which the actions of citizens and public servants can lead directly to either peaceful political development and stability or backsliding into further conflict and crisis—tend to be fleeting. Through its unique operating methodology, OTI capitalizes on these windows of opportunity by rapidly identifying and supporting key actors and critical processes. OTI seeks to bolster progress, build public confidence, and diminish the likelihood of a return to conflict by identifying make-or-break issues that could determine the direction of a transition, then finding creative ways to help address them in the short term until longer-term political, security, and economic reforms can take place.

APPROACH

In 15 years OTI has endured its own transition from a small collection of inspired professionals on a journey to create a new type of assistance programming to a far more institutionalized USAID office, with established systems and procedures that add structure to new programs based on lessons learned.

Maintaining a program that is flexible, high-yield, and responsive to changing political dynamics demands hands-on, operationally intense program management. Unlike many long-term development programs that delegate daily program management responsibilities to intermediary grantees or contractors, OTI establishes a seamless working relationship with the implementing partner to ensure that the program responds quickly and effectively as conditions change. OTI and the implementing partner operate as a single team characterized by daily interaction, information sharing, and collaborative strategic planning and decision making, with OTI's intensive oversight and guidance.

In this way OTI is an operational rather than a supervisory development enterprise unit. Where security permits, OTI representatives, with implementing partners, play a direct role in all aspects of grant implementation, from identifying and facilitating activities and acting as community organizers to opening lines of communication between elected officials and their constituents. OTI personnel are housed within the USAID Mission, and through regular interface and updates with Mission and Embassy staff they can readily translate current U.S. policy into action. Meanwhile, they regularly provide Mission and Embassy staff with insights and analysis generated from local activities that can be used to guide future U.S. policy and programming.

STRATEGIC PLANNING, MONITORING, AND EVALUATION

Before launching any new program, OTI first conducts an in-country, context-specific assessment, which is integral to defining programmatic assumptions and strategic objectives. By addressing both the political and developmental appropriateness of engagement, OTI assessments inform higher-level decision-making related not only to OTI's own potential engagement but also to future or changed engagements by other bureaus and offices within USAID.

Normally conducted over a two-week period, the OTI assessment reviews the four **criteria for engagement:** (1) Is the country important to U.S. national interests? (2) Is there a window of op-

OTI/Sudan

OTI's unique approach to programming requires constant reassessment of strategy, tactics, and activities, because the environments in which it operates are fluid and unpredictable.

portunity? (3) Can OTI's involvement significantly increase the chances of a successful transition? (4) Is the operating environment sufficiently stable?

OTI engages key counterparts while conducting the assessment, including the USAID Mission, the Embassy, and the Regional Bureau. It also meets with host-country government officials and nongovernmental interlocutors representing local communities, civil society, the media, and international organizations. Where the assessment team determines that OTI engagement is appropriate, it will also recommend an initial strategy. Once external stakeholders in USAID and the State Department have reviewed, provided feedback on, and approved the assessment, OTI provides a report to Congress five days before initiating a new program of assistance. This provides another critical check as well as serving as a source of strategic feedback.

The initial strategy, however, is just the starting point for the program. OTI's unique approach to programming requires constant reassessment of strategy, tactics, and activities, because the environments in which it operates are fluid and unpredictable. This means the process of program analysis and retargeting of objectives must be continuous. To manage this process of rolling analysis throughout the entire program cycle, OTI has developed flexible approaches to monitoring implementation and evaluating outputs and impact. These include regular assessments and reassessments of OTI country programs at the strategic (political analysis), program (design, priorities, and tactics), and project (implementation and impact) levels.

In-country analysis mechanisms that allow OTI to more effectively adapt program design and activities as political circumstances emerge or change within the country include

- Daily contact and weekly and monthly program meetings with local staff to discuss what is being done and new ideas, challenges, and opportunities;
- Periodic (generally quarterly) strategy meetings during which country program staff conduct a formal analysis of the program at the three analytical levels, with OTI Washington regional team staff usually in attendance;
- Management reviews of OTI and implementing partner management systems carried out by senior OTI staff, who identify good practices and areas for improvement; and
- Program Performance Reviews that link the ongoing process of political analysis and decision-making in the field with peer review and evaluation at headquarters.

Just as continuous analysis of strategy and program design takes place at a macro level, the same process is done daily at the micro level. Changes in program activities may result from (1) focus groups, polling, or subjective analysis indicating that certain activities are having more impact than others; (2) sudden changes in the political climate; and (3) evolving U.S. government priorities. OTI program strategy thus continues to target new windows of opportunity; the tactics used to address them also evolve as events mandate.

In high-profile, high-pressure environments, OTI's reputation for rapid response leads to expectations for rapid reporting on the results of individual activities. Every OTI program needs to be able to demonstrate impact of the overall program; impact is impossible to capture if program staff do not effec-

Lei Gong

tively record project outcomes at various stages of the grant cycle. Good information management requires that each member of OTI's country program team records relevant information (notes, site visit accounts, budgets, anecdotes, and photos) in the activity database where colleagues can easily find and use it. At a minimum, two data points are monitored and evaluated: the implementation process (outputs) and the impact of the grant (outcomes); the database has specific fields for each. When an activity is completed, two final write-ups are generated and incorporated into the database: the grantee report, which gives the local counterpart's perspective on the activity, and a final evaluation, which looks at whether the grant's initial aims were met and any positive or negative impacts that resulted.

A final evaluation, usually performed by an external firm during the closeout phase, critiques program effectiveness and determines how well the program met its goals. Finally, programs benefit from an after-exit review (AER), a tool OTI uses to critique the operations and management of its programs and identify best practices and lessons learned. AERs focus on the relationship between OTI and the implementing partner, how it helped or hindered the effectiveness of the program, and how lessons can be applied to future programs.

ACTIVITY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

In its approach to grant-making, OTI often seeks out promising new leaders and organizations in the host country that can become engines of reform and positive change. While these potential partners—fledgling nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), informal student groups, local entrepreneurs, and rural villagers, for example—demonstrate that they have the creativity and energy to make a difference for their communities, they often lack the capacity to effectively seek out and administer donor support. They also generally lack the accounting systems that donors require to ensure fiscal responsibility and reporting.

OTI often seeks out promising new leaders and organizations in the host country that can become engines of reform and positive change.

Instead of waiting to be approached for assistance or for proposals to come forward through a time-consuming formal grant solicitation process, OTI personnel and implementing partner staff are expected to reach out and identify local agents of change and work with them to translate good ideas into quick and effective action plans and projects.

The proposal process is therefore abbreviated but highly interactive, with OTI and implementing partner staff working with prospective grantees to draft two to three-page activity descriptions that serve as the basis for new grants. Funding decisions are normally made within days, not weeks or months. Once an activity proves successful, its scope and scale may be expanded through successive rounds of funding. This partly explains why OTI is able to award hundreds of small grants in each country program every year to new grantees that would otherwise not have access to donor support. By deploying activities in ways that are strategic and catalytic, OTI strives for maximum impact from limited resources while minimizing bureaucratic hurdles.

Because country programs often require working with untested leaders and groups, rather than giving cash grants OTI generally offers in-kind material support, in effect a package of goods and services that might include office equipment, construction supplies, and training. This approach both reduces risk and allows the grantee to focus on the activity's objectives rather than on financial accounting. Most activities are implemented through a grants-under-contract mechanism in which OTI and its implementing partner collaborate closely on the design and implementation of each grant. By keeping individual grants small—typically $5,000 to $50,000—OTI limits the exposure and risk of each activity.

OTI encourages staff empowerment at all levels and, as far as possible, delegation of authority and decision-making to the field. It gives its country representatives great flexibility: they are authorized to approve grants of up to $100,000. But activity design and approval are not conducted in a vacuum. Both to avoid duplication of effort and implementation of problematic or ineffective activities, new project ideas are often "ground-truthed" by country representatives through consultations with Mission colleagues, the Embassy, and the OTI country team in Washington.

MECHANISMS

The mechanisms that permit OTI to determine the appropriateness of engagement and begin operations in a new country quickly and effectively include an experienced and highly adaptable human resource pool, tailored instruments for designing and implementing programs, and an integrated system of knowledge management tools.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Perhaps the most critical element in addressing immediate crises is the ability to deploy personnel and resources in the quickest possible time, often in tenuous security conditions. OTI's pool of professionals consists of seasoned development experts with a wide range of experience in conflict and post-conflict settings around the world.

Both field and Washington staff are responsible for designing programs that take into account the political factors on the ground. Staff design a strategic approach that articulates OTI's initial decision to engage in a country. Country

OTI/Sudan

representatives are, at the same time, venture capitalists: they must be able to effectively consider scope and scale to determine how large and intensive a program must be in order to have significant impact. Weighing the consequences of error against those of inaction, they are encouraged to experiment with new approaches and take calculated risks.

With only a limited number of direct hire personnel, OTI has a high ratio of temporary personal services contractor staff (USPSCs). This uncommon staffing pattern has both positives and negatives. One of the benefits to the U.S. government of this structure is the surge capacity that OTI has demonstrated in larger programs like those in Iraq and Afghanistan. USPSCs allow for more management flexibility as staff can be more readily hired and deployed; they are selected because the specific skills and experience they already have means they need little training before deployment. However, USPSCs do not have clear longer-term career path options compared to permanent hire staff, there is less agency commitment to their retention, and they have less employee authority and status within the government structure. OTI and other USAID offices in the same situation have been working to address these issues in order to improve USPSC working conditions and status.

A critical component of OTI's rapid-deployment capacity is its "bullpen." This group of development specialists is staffed by USPSCs on intermittent contracts so that OTI can use their services as needed. Bullpen personnel conduct rapid assessments, help shape OTI country strategies, and support country teams in both Washington and the field. The bullpen has proven to be particularly flexible and effective. Immediately before or within days of an official request by USAID, the State Department, the National Security Council, or an Embassy to initiate a TI program, a bullpen team, usually accompanied by a member of the OTI Washington office, deploys to the field to conduct the initial assessment. If the decision is

The bullpen and the unique staffing pattern allow OTI to rapidly ramp up or scale down staff and program resources to respond to urgent USG priorities.

made to initiate a new program, bullpen personnel often lead start-up activities in country as acting country representatives until the process of hiring a longer-term USPSC to fill the position is complete.

The bullpen and the unique staffing pattern allow OTI to rapidly ramp up or scale down staff and program resources to respond to urgent USG priorities. Most members of the bullpen, who include former USAID Mission Directors and others with significant management background, have experience working on OTI programs. Many have particular expertise in conflict-prone environments and are familiar with the special challenges of transition programming. Collectively, the bullpen brings to bear over 300 years of conflict-related experience.

CHOOSING AN IMPLEMENTING PARTNER

The success of an OTI program depends in large part on its implementing partner on the ground. The partner will have specialized expertise and capabilities that OTI deems instrumental in reaching out to target audiences, accessing key regions, and providing tailored programming that addresses unique needs during a country's transition. Depending on the type of partner needed, there are three primary means by which OTI can select implementing partners to manage grant administration, logistics, staffing, and financial management for its country programs.

Partnerships with development consulting firms are organized through OTI's in-house contracting mechanism, SWIFT—"Support Which Implements Fast Transitions." SWIFT is an indefinite quantity contract (IQC) that permits OTI to access the services of prequalified contractors through a competitive process that results in the award of country-specific task orders. Immediately after the task order is issued, the implementing partner works with OTI on programmatic and operational details for the particular program, fields expatriate staff, begins hiring local staff, and sets up an office. The SWIFT mechanism allows OTI to rapidly establish offices, mobilize local program personnel, and begin approving activities and disbursing grants to local organizations. There are currently seven firms, including one small business, that hold the SWIFT IQC: AECOM, International Resources Group, Casals & Associates, Chemonics International, Development Alternatives, Inc., Development & Training Services (a woman-owned small business), and Creative Associates.

OTI also employs two USAID "assistance" mechanisms—cooperative agreements and grants—to support work by international organizations, nonprofits, and U.S. private voluntary organizations (PVOs) that meet OTI engagement criteria.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Fast-paced, flexible transition programming requires timely local analysis. OTI has therefore evolved well-tailored operations and knowledge management tools that provide timely, accurate, detailed, and centralized data so that all personnel assigned to a particular program are working from the same base of information. Both OTI and implementing partner field and home office personnel are trained to use these systems at the outset of each country program.

OTI's worldwide activity database is a simple and effective information system that serves as a program management, tracking, and reporting tool. In each

OTI/Sudan

Lei Gong

country, the database serves as the main instrument for chronicling the life cycles and outcomes of individual activities and is the primary library of data from which working documents and internal and external reports are generated. Evaluators, peer review teams, and others who need to research active or past OTI programs use it to read the story of a program through its lifecycle. It also allows staff at headquarters to provide immediate, up-to-date information to audiences in Washington without needing to query field teams.

The high yield of its country operations meant that OTI needed a corollary information system with the capacity to manage equally intensive operational and financial processes in Washington. The process of bringing the TOMAS ("Transition Office Management and Accounting System") to fruition involved combining over 20 previously separate systems into one fully integrated management system covering budget, finance, procurement, travel, and emergency contact information. Both the activity database and TOMAS were developed internally, with no external IT consultants, using licensed agency software and OTI practitioners as the primary designers.

OTI continues to look for ways to make programs more effective and expand the level of communication and collaboration both within OTI and with external partners. Promoting tight integration and information-sharing among staff around the globe with virtual discussions, blogs, shared visualization tools, document stores, and other new technologies enhances the capabilities of in-country staff. Over the past three years, for example, OTI has incorporated global information systems (GIS) capabilities into its activity database and is now able to easily generate accurate maps and geographic information related to its programs. While OTI is still in the process of mainstreaming "geospatial thinking" and web-based GIS tools as integral elements of its strategic analysis, it will continue to incorporate new technologies as a matter of principle.

CULTURE

OTI's organizational culture and philosophy values innovation, problem-solving, speed, and a degree of risk tasking. These essential ingredients explain its impact to date as much as its mechanisms and approach. From the beginning, OTI sought an organizational ethos shaped by innovation and political dexterity, with a staff that could navigate through uncharted development contexts and excel in high-pressure conflict environments. As a small operational unit within USAID, OTI can foster a more participatory spirit; fewer bureaucratic levels in a relatively horizontal management structure give it more programmatic latitude.

From the beginning, OTI sought an organizational ethos shaped by innovation and political dexterity, with a staff that could navigate through uncharted development contexts and excel in high-pressure conflict environments.

At headquarters all OTI personnel, regardless of grade, area of expertise, or breadth of experience, may actively participate in strategic decision-making, contribute to the design of OTI's operations manuals and systems, and offer constructive criticism to senior management. OTI also has increased efforts to train new staff members on its culture and approach, in recent years focusing increased resources on staff training and mentoring.

The same OTI culture is readily applied in the field. While the primary responsibility for strategic direction and tactical implementation of each OTI program falls to the country representative, the most successful programs establish consultative, inclusive processes that feed into grant design from the outset. This in turn encourages program staff to replicate this approach during grant implementation as it relates to the participation of local partners and communities.

Ultimately, OTI's culture, approach, and mechanisms are intended to contribute to two overarching programmatic objectives: to respond strategically to evolving U.S. foreign policy imperatives, and to have a visible, positive impact on the lives of local communities as part of the movement toward peace and democracy. By targeting funding strategically at key actors and key areas at the opportune time, OTI programming aims to facilitate the most change possible with available resources and in doing so to assure skeptical or conflict-impacted populations that the risks of change are worth taking.

OTI/Sudan

OTI/Lebanon

" [OTI] programs may take the form of traditional development—civil society, media, rule of law—but they are adapted and executed at a pace resembling emergency programming."

PARTNERSHIPS

" OTI…provided the much-needed bridge between the start of our projects and the site preparation, which saved us several weeks of project time and countless millions of dollars. Additionally, OTI [programs were] a tremendous injection into the economy, as it meant jobs across most of the city."

— Colonel Kendall Cox, Army 1st Cavalry, on the collaboration between OTI and U.S. military forces

The OTI cultural approach is reflected in its partnerships with a variety of intra-agency and other U.S. Government stakeholders, local and international organizations, academic institutions and think tanks, nonprofit and private development firms, and military entities. OTI personnel share information and coordinate with colleagues from the fellow bureau offices of Foreign Disaster Assistance, Conflict Management and Mitigation, and Democracy and Governance, with Regional Bureaus, and with other USAID units.

Where appropriate, OTI engages with the Department of State's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) to assist in its efforts to coordinate U.S. Government stabilization assistance. Collaboration between OTI and S/CRS has involved transition programming initiated by OTI that is later part of follow-on or supplemental technical support by S/CRS. Such was the case in Haiti, where S/CRS provided $20 million in funding to continue TI activities through implementing partner International Organization for Migration (IOM) after the OTI Haiti program ended in 2006.

OTI works with bilateral donors and international organizations such as the World Bank, the United Nations, and their affiliates to leverage small-scale OTI assistance with larger institutional efforts. In addition to its seven international development partners institutionalized through the SWIFT IQC, OTI also has operational partners with which it often collaborates through grants and cooperative agreements, such as IOM, Internews, the National Democratic Institute, and the International Republican Institute. Think tanks

and academic institutions that serve as common external sources of political analysis and new thinking about foreign assistance include the Woodrow Wilson Center, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Center for a New American Security, the Brookings Institution, the United States Institute of Peace, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Carter Center.

PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION: COORDINATION WITH THE MILITARY

Donors operating in areas experiencing armed conflict often find it too dangerous to reach the people living in the most desperate circumstances. As it increasingly engages in highly unstable countries, OTI has faced the challenge of implementing projects in marginalized communities while minimizing staff exposure to violence and danger. Coordination with military organizations has been crucial in meeting this challenge.

OTI program personnel have worked with international peacekeeping, host country, and USG military forces in countries ranging from Haiti and Colombia to Afghanistan and Iraq. In Haiti, OTI worked alongside MINUSTAH, the U.N. peacekeeping force, to implement projects in gang violence-ravaged slums like Cité Soleil and Bel Air in Port-au-Prince in order to establish a secure environment for residents, funding rapid community-based projects to reduce tensions and build social cohesion. OTI has coordinated extensively with Colombia's civilian government and military to ensure that its projects are in line with government strategy and objectives, identify sufficiently secure areas to operate in, and work out the logistical details of delivering projects in insecure locations. This partnership has been critical to the program's progress to date and is indicative of OTI's success at civilian-military partnerships.

The OTI program in Iraq established a close working relationship with the U.S. military and other coalition forces deployed in volatile areas. For example, OTI worked with the U.S. Army's 1st Cavalry Division and 3rd and 4th Infantry Divisions to identify priority areas and projects in Baghdad. OTI worked with its military counterparts to find jobs for young Iraqis, employing some 40,000 to 60,000 men at a time. The 1st Calvary ultimately posted a transition liaison officer full-time with the OTI team to facilitate planning and programming.

In these partnerships the respective roles of OTI and its military counterparts are well defined, and on-site coordination is emphasized as the primary shared benefit of any collaboration. Military partners help insulate OTI staff from combat situations and provide valuable recommendations for new programming initiatives in advance of OTI site visits. In extremely insecure environments military units on patrol are able to independently monitor OTI-administered projects. While the military might share the same goals, OTI maintains the programmatic lead with its guiding principle of supporting peaceful transition.

As it increasingly engages in highly unstable countries, OTI has faced the challenge of implementing projects in marginalized communities while minimizing staff exposure to violence and danger.

INITIATIVES

Flexible formats make possible a wide range of activities to address critical needs in unstable regions and bolster the efforts of local groups to build positive change.

OTI/Afghanistan

OTI supports the efforts of forward-thinking governments, fledgling local organizations advocating on transition issues, and energetic emerging leaders representing marginalized groups. Its programs may take the form of traditional development—civil society, media, rule of law—but they are adapted and executed at a pace resembling emergency programming.

Within a compressed timeframe and with investments that are by design limited in scale, OTI's responses must be rapid and opportunistic. They address critical transition priorities through tangible projects—a rebuilt school, a rehabilitated bridge to connect communities, a refurbished market that had been destroyed by armed insurgents—that help reconcile rival groups or help fragile governments better respond to citizen needs. Tailored media and public communications strategies inform decision-making, dispel false rumors, and promote positive changes in public perceptions. These and similar activities demonstrate new ways to address local issues or disputes, replacing past divisive, abusive practices.

The underlying objective can often be even more important than the actual project. A rebuilt market's immediate impact is to allow local women to sell agriculture products, but the longer-term impact is bringing rival ethnic groups to one place to work productively. A short-term works project for young ex-combatants generates immediate income, but it also buys time for peace to gain a footing and encourages productive behavior for young men at risk of resorting to violence. Support for rehabilitating a local school improves education opportunities for children and may also foster closer dialogue and understanding between the local government and the community in identifying local priorities and applying resources to them. While many of its activities can be categorized as traditional development programs–micro-enterprise, income generation, education, community development, etc.–OTI designs its activities through the prism of the

OTI/Lebanon

anticipated positive impact on resolving or reducing local disputes and conflict.

BUILDING DEMAND FOR PEACEFUL CHANGE

In many countries where OTI operates, civil society institutions are historically weak or were purged during periods of political repression and armed conflict. OTI empowers NGOs to play a meaningful role in the political process and promotes an environment in which groups both new and existing can thrive. In close coordination with local project staff, OTI identifies promising formal and informal organizations and community groups. Whether providing basic office equipment, supporting innovative project ideas, sponsoring workshops and conferences, or building new alliances and coalitions, OTI helps these partners develop the professionalism and confidence to conduct effective advocacy and advance peaceful change.

In the wake of the prodemocracy Cedar Revolution in early 2005 and the end of the month-long **Lebanon** War in August 2006, OTI saw an opportunity to address long-standing tensions in Lebanon that threatened to destabilize the democratic system of an important U.S. ally in the Middle East. OTI activities directly address the root causes of tensions between rival ethnic, religious, and political factions by encouraging cooperation between hostile local groups. One recent activity brought together farmers from seven villages in Lebanon's deep South. They shared stories of their agricultural successes and challenges in a series of workshops designed to improve cooperation between Shia, Sunni, and Christian communities in the segregated region. Led by the Scientific Research Foundation (SRF), a local NGO, the inter-village workshops helped farmers who have traditionally not interacted to discover the value of their neighbors' knowledge. "I could not have imagined it possible that Christians and Muslim farmers could come together to share their stories like this," said Shamam Al Nasser, a workshop participant from the village of Bustan. He also said that bringing farmers together was a groundbreaking way to enhance agricultural productivity and address the needs of an area still recovering from the damage inflicted during the 2006 war.

Two months of violence triggered by the December 2007 elections led OTI to launch a postconflict initiative in **Kenya**, a country that had been a success story for stable, democratic governance in a region where war, poverty, and exclusion have been the tragic rule. After quickly establishing positive relationships with a number of community-based organizations and individuals involved in peace-building and reconciliation efforts, OTI launched a series of activities designed to engage and build bridges among Kenya's ethnic groups. Through one of the new projects, OTI is working to alleviate interethnic tensions in the town of Eldoret, which was a scene of major ethnic violence between the Kalenjin and Kikuyu peoples during and after the elections and is widely believed to have significant potential for renewed conflict. Working through a respected local NGO, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, OTI organized dialogues where representatives from the two communities for the first time since the conflict are able to air grievances in a constructive forum. The dialogues are already paying dividends: joint Kalenjin and Kikuyu efforts have generated innovative new project ideas for infrastructure reconstruction and other activities that are ideal for additional in-kind OTI support.

OTI's **Bolivia** program, which ended in 2007, aimed to reduce tensions and build community cohesion in areas prone to social conflict, reinforce government capacity to respond to citizen needs, and facilitate peaceful, constructive participation in the democratic process. One of its key initiatives was a partnership with an alliance of five indigenous youth organizations in Aymara communities in the Bolivian high plains. The alliance supported community workshops for citizens living in remote rural areas about civic responsibilities and the importance of their participation in the country's electoral processes. Participating youth leaders returned to their home communities to apply what they learned through a community development project. These courses were the first to be offered in many rural areas of La Paz. Overall, OTI support helped indigenous youth groups to organize hundreds of workshops and distribute information to more than 200,000 citizens living in rural communities.

In **Kosovo** in 1999, when there were no functioning institutions of local gover-

nance, OTI and contractor staff worked in seven municipalities around the province to maximize the number of Kosovars participating in setting priorities and making decisions about their future. By organizing town hall-style meetings, OTI encouraged the development of Community Improvement Councils, each comprising 12–15 people who reflected the political, social, and intellectual diversity of local populations. With the experience gained in representing their communities and addressing urgent priorities, many council members were later elected to public office, bringing moderate democratic voices to Kosovo's often-volatile political life.

ENABLING INDEPENDENT MEDIA

States in transition usually have little history of free, independent, and responsible media; and where such media once existed, they have been decimated by repressive regimes. A core need of a functional democratic society is the free exchange of ideas through independent media. Political events like peace agreements and free elections can provide windows of opportunity to foster independent print, radio, and television outlets. Working through existing and new government structures and local groups, OTI media activities aim to increase access to accurate, independent, and uncensored information on national developments.

Media support is especially essential in circumstances where radio is the only source of vital information for citizens living in remote areas. In **Afghanistan** in 2004, spring rains that brought relief to areas affected by years of drought also brought flooding to many areas. On March 29, an ancient dam unable to contain the high water levels suddenly ruptured, engulfing the southeastern

USAID/ Sudan

city of Ghazni and other villages in a flash flood. The disaster could have been catastrophic, except for the pre-flood warning provided by the local OTI-supported FM radio station, Radio Ghaznawiyaan. The station's quick-thinking journalists called the Ghazni Provincial Governor while on the air to channel direct information to its audience. The governor confirmed the likelihood that the dam might fail and lead to life-threatening flooding, and urged listeners to evacuate the area. The message, which was also channeled through the 31 other radio stations that comprise the OTI-funded network of independent radio stations, saved the lives of thousands of men, women, and children. Development of the community radio networks was part of a multipronged effort to build the media environment in Afghanistan. Other activities included the launch of Kabul's first independent, non-state-owned radio station; a grant to the Institute for War and Peace Reporting to build the capacity of local print and broadcast journalists; upgrading of infrastructure through shortwave transmitters and other critical communications equipment; and support for the Loya Jirga, Afghanistan's traditional process for selecting a national government, to educate the public and report on the electoral body's activities.

After the Sun City Peace Accords were signed in April 2003, OTI supported efforts in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** to increase the access of citizens living throughout the country to balanced, accurate information. OTI provided two transmitters and four new relay stations to Radio Okapi, which was run by the UN peacekeeping operation, enabling it to expand its broadcasting capability to nine locations and making it a truly national network. Radio Okapi's local-language radio programs have disseminated information about humanitarian assistance, the peace process, and demobilization and reintegration while engaging Congolese throughout the country in debates of national importance. OTI also supported a radio show in Bukavu focusing on the effects of war on youth. Broadcast in the country's war-affected eastern provinces, the radio show was written and produced by an ethnically diverse group of young people, including for-

A core need of a functional democratic society is the free exchange of ideas through independent media.

There are few operating environments where it is impossible to carry out an effective TI program.

mer child soldiers. In 2004, UNICEF/One World awarded the team the Children's Lives, Children's Voices Award for the world's best radio program produced by, for, and about children.

In **Venezuela,** OTI funded Venezuela Convive, a national campaign promoting the theme of "convivencia"—peaceful coexistence—in a politically charged and polarized environment. This program consisted of television and radio public service announcements that were combined with workshops implemented through a network of more than 250 organizations and 2,500 volunteers in 12 states. The successful effort was subsequently supported by the World Bank and the Canadian Embassy.

OTI identified opportunities in **Peru** to help national and local government partners disseminate information on national issues to the general public that would help legitimize elected leaders and support regional and local governance processes. OTI funded a nationwide campaign designed by the Presidency of the Cabinet (PCM) to educate the population about their maturing democracy. The campaign produced eight decentralization-themed radio public service announcements that were broadcast more than 1,000 times on six national radio stations in 40 cities, and four television spots that were broadcast more than 200 times. The PCM's campaign, which coincided with a national campaign by the Congressional Decentralization Commission, also generated opinion polls and focus group reports.

To support the Dayton Peace Accords in **Bosnia-Herzegovina,** OTI began in 1996 to help local partners draft media messages designed to reshape hardline nationalist attitudes and promote respect for human rights and basic freedoms. Focusing its assistance on alternative media in underserved areas of the country—where most journalists said OTI was their only source of funding for equipment and operating expenses—OTI worked with Bosnian media outlets to produce public service announcements, distribute copies of official texts, and conduct informational call-in shows.

STABILIZATION AND ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE

There are few operating environments where it is impossible to carry out an effective TI program. During its 15 years OTI has learned to adapt quickly to a variety of environments, even in regions where hostilities continue, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. However, OTI's fourth criterion for engagement—whether conditions on the ground are sufficiently stable to implement a TI initiatives program effectively—is still critical for determining whether a program is appropriate. But the criterion has also become a critical first question in informing how the OTI operational model can be adapted to dangerous environments in a way that achieves program objectives while ensuring staff safety.

Conditions in states in transition generally tend to be fluid. In fact, the fluidity of a political transition gives OTI its raison d'être; transition programming, through its rolling strategic analysis and rapid response capability, is designed to anticipate and respond to constant change—instability—in the operating environment. Its role as one of the key U.S. Government's crisis response instruments means that OTI has had to discover and continually refine new methods of conducting civilian operations in unsafe areas. For example, the lessons it learned from the Iraq and Afghanistan experiences, such as how to implement projects and carry out due diligence in places where USG staff movement is restricted and implementing partner staff must serve as their eyes and ears, are being applied in newer programs in Pakistan and Lebanon.

Several OTI programs incorporate stabilization activities as a central component of strategy, in effect buying time for parallel good governance processes and peace initiatives to take hold. In some cases, this may be as simple as introducing short-term employment projects for young people in crisis countries as part of OTI's counter-insurgency activities to counterbalance extremist calls for insurgency and violence. Other conditions call for OTI support for host governments to rapidly respond to basic community needs in areas recently occupied by insurgents, which builds trust and understanding between the communities and the government.

OTI launched a program in **Colombia** in March 2007 to help stabilize postconflict areas of the country by strengthening Government of Colombia (GOC) responsiveness to community needs, thereby building citizen confidence in an enduring State presence. In areas recently recovered from illegally armed groups, such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and groups connected to narcotrafficking, the government has limited time to establish credibility and provide peace dividends to populations accustomed to civil war and marginalization. OTI is working with the Center for Coordination of Integrated Action (CCAI, by its Spanish acronym), part of the Office of

OTI/Sudan

the Presidency, to engage citizens and government in a local, participatory, transparent process to set priorities, select projects, and provide rapid assistance to schools, sports programs, and health centers; improve water, electricity, and road infrastructure; and organize quick-impact income-generating projects in recovering communities. With its capability to demonstrate its commitment to provide public goods and services reinforced, the GOC is increasingly seen as a partner rather than an adversary. Particularly promising is the progress made in building trust among all elements of the Colombian government—armed forces, police, and civilian GOC representatives—in contrast to past distrust of the GOC. On several projects, local communities are now actively seeking to work with elements of the GOC to implement community-based activities.

After a decade-long armed Maoist insurgency, young people in **Nepal,** who were instrumental in reinstating democracy during the Jana Andolaan II peace movement in April 2006, have played both positive and negative roles in the country's transition. Accordingly, a core component of OTI's stabilization program involves educating youth on political tolerance and nonviolent means of political expression. In April 2008, OTI, in coordination with a local volunteer advocacy organization, quickly organized a day-long cultural and awareness-raising event on the second anniversary of Jana Andolaan II. It was organized not only to mark the anniversary and celebrate the success of the recent Constituent Assembly elections but also to inform youth about the importance of democracy and the peace process. Eight thousand people participated in the event, which incorporated speeches by authorities, street dramas, poetry readings, a concert, and an exhibit of photographs taken during the Jana Andolaan II demonstrations—all emphasizing the positive role that youth can play in promoting democracy.

Collaborating closely with both the Haitian government and MINUSTAH, the U.N. peacekeeping force in **Haiti,** in 2005 OTI's Haiti Transition Initiative targeted its activities to poor communities affected by gang violence. These tended to be labor-intensive projects, such as road repair, designed to provide short-term income and integrate disaffected youths into society while building the credibility of the central government in these areas. Residents of one of the target communities, Grand Ravine, expressed interest in holding a festival of traditional Haitian rara music for the Easter holidays. This request gave OTI an opportunity to bring together the Haitian Ministry of Culture and Communication, which helped organize the festival, and the MINUSTAH disarmament program, which gave T-shirts with peace messages to the public as well as musicians. The successful collaboration resulted in a plan to incorporate disarmament into the OTI program. Previously, when former gang members obtained employment on OTI project sites, there was no obligation to relinquish a weapon and no barrier to resuming gang activities at the end of the project. Later infrastructure projects required former gang members to turn in weapons at a MINUSTAH deposit point before they could work on the OTI project site. By offering tangible alternatives to violence, the program was able to establish in the minds of local youth a direct association between peace, economic opportunity, and community development.

In November 2007, OTI launched a program in **Pakistan's** Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) to improve the capacity of the Government of Pakistan (GOP) to engage with and deliver services to tribal communities. The FATA Transition Initiative (FTI) is designed to improve the economic and social environment in the region through small community enhancement projects. FTI will also support the GOP in increasing public access to information about its social, economic, and political activities and policies in FATA.

INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION OF MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS

The collapse of a repressive government can at times create space for

previously marginalized groups to speak out and finally participate in the political process. But again, the window of opportunity to facilitate their constructive participation may be small, and often participatory mechanisms need to be created from scratch.

OTI sees the activity cycle itself as a training tool for marginalized groups to learn how to participate constructively. It encourages its program staff to maximize the number of local citizens who participate in choosing a project activity and in the design, implementation, and monitoring of an activity. As a result, local partner stakeholders who participate in generating ideas and implementing activities benefit directly from both their participation and the grant's original objective. For example, people making the decision to hold a conference on citizens' rights and responsibilities and organizing it benefit as much from the grant—perhaps more so—as the community members who attend to learn about their civil rights.

This dynamic results in a multiplier effect: local partners, having successfully participated in an OTI-sponsored event, expand the size and extend the reach of OTI program staff, identifying new micro-level windows of opportunity and formulating new ideas based on their initial project experiences. This approach is important for small-grant programs, which alone are unlikely to reach a critical mass of a country's population.

This dynamic also explains why OTI activities are tailored specifically to the unique problems of targeted marginalized groups, such as women and youth traditionally excluded from decision-making processes and employment opportunities; ethnic and religious minorities who have suffered from discrimination and repression; communities in

OTI/Sierra Leone

remote rural areas; and disenfranchised populations. OTI partners with these groups, as both partners and beneficiaries, to design activities that at once improve their livelihoods and reinforce their capacity to participate constructively in the political transition process.

While security in recently recovered zones is still a serious constraint in **Colombia,** OTI has managed to work with communities that lie beyond the tiny relatively secure urban areas to which the GOC presence was previously confined. In many of these areas, rapid economic activity is critical to helping communities that previously produced coca to transition to licit productive activities. Two such projects created connections between agricultural producers and previously inaccessible markets in Bogota. The first provided support to small yucca growers, arranging for technical training in improved production methodologies. The second supported a new association of watermelon growers, providing technical assistance and equipment to improve irrigation systems so that they can produce watermelon four times a year to supply markets in Bogota and the departmental capital. These projects have helped producers not only to increase the quantity and improve the quality of their products but also, by connecting them to untapped markets, to improve their marketing and long-term capacity to improve profit margins and incomes.

OTI prioritized support to **Afghan** women and girls as part of its strategy for stable democratic transition in Afghanistan. To date, it has spent approximately $1.1 million on projects that directly affect women and girls. One grant funded rehabilitation of the building complex of the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs and provided technical assistance to the Ministry. The rehabilitated complex provided a venue for the ceremonial meetings for the International Woman's Day Conference, which the Ministry hosted in Kabul on March 8, 2002. Also on Women's Day, the women's rights organization Ariana, which provided underground

educational and vocational courses to women and girls of all ages during the Taliban regime, held graduation services at its OTI-rehabilitated offices for the brave women who had participated. The significance of the event was highlighted by the attendance of the Minister of Women's Affairs, who presented certificates to the graduates. OTI also provided two grants to the Afghan Women's Network (AWN), another national NGO. The first helped AWN identify the needs and priorities of women and families throughout Afghanistan. The second helped AWN train 30 refugee and internally displaced women in management skills. OTI's support was designed both to help AWN enhance the participation of women in the emerging political process and to build the capacity of program participants to help them achieve economic independence.

In the **Bolivian** altiplano of La Paz, the Catholic University of Bolivia (UCB) operates rural technical training academies (UACs) that instruct gifted indigenous youth in agricultural science, nursing, and business studies. Because their locations are remote, the academies historically paid extremely high prices for inadequate Internet connections or lacked Internet access altogether. In partnership with the Motorola Corporation and the regional government of La Paz, OTI helped the UCB bring the latest in information technology to the cradle of the Aymara civilization to benefit these academies and their communities. OTI funded installation of ultra-high-speed Internet service, which amplifies Internet bandwidth via a network of antennas, to reach an area of more than 50 square miles and operate at an altitude of 14,000 feet. Local Internet service now operates 32 times faster than before; transfer rates increased from 64 kilobytes to 2 megabytes per second. UAC students can now participate in online training courses, quickly download large texts from digital libraries, and access 2,300 television channels from 110 countries. The initiative reduced the cost of Internet service for the three academies by nearly one-third. The project benefited more than 2,000 students studying at four rural agricultural academies, providing new incentive for talented indigenous youth to improve agricultural and cattle production in their home communities instead of battling for scant work opportunities in overburdened urban centers.

As the nation prepared for elections in October 2005, the OTI program in **Liberia** implemented a program to encourage the engagement of youth in the political process. For years, Liberia's youth—50% of the country's population—have played a significant role in conflict, both directly as members of fighting forces and indirectly as "spoilers" quick to resort to violence to disrupt attempts at peace. For Liberia to forge a path to peace, its youth had to be informed about the political process and encouraged to vote for their new government so that their voices will be heard during the political transition. OTI, in collaboration with the Liberian National Elections Commission (NEC), designed a program called "Seeds of Peace: Youth Promoting Nonviolent Elections." Based on a peer-to-peer education model that trained 2,200 volunteers, the program facilitated civic education activities for 40,000 youth and community residents in five cities. Participants learned about voting basics, democratic values, and the importance of engaging in electoral processes without resorting to intimidation and violence. The activity was typical of OTI's contributions in Liberia, which began in February 2004, in support of good governance, human rights, transitional justice, and community reconciliation in the wake of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

OTI activities are tailored specifically to the unique problems of targeted marginalized groups, such as women and youth traditionally excluded from decision-making processes and employment opportunities; ethnic and religious minorities who have suffered from discrimination and repression; communities in remote rural areas; and disenfranchised populations.

Across **Iraq** OTI opened 22 women's rights centers to help widowed, impoverished, and vulnerable women to improve their lives and those of their children. Open to all women, the centers offer nutrition and health classes, literacy programs, democracy and civic education, and Internet cafes where computer skills are taught and networking promoted. The centers give women an opportunity to prepare themselves as leaders and valuable participants in the reconstruction of a democratic Iraq.

In **East Timor,** which was devastated by departing Indonesian troops following a 1999 referendum calling for independence (the U.S. was among the first countries to recognize its independence), community-based projects put people to work to repair damaged infrastructure. The Timorese had long been ruled from afar and had little experience in self-governance. They also had few resources of their own to begin reconstruction. At

a time when the UN had yet to become fully operational there, OTI was able to organize massive road-clearing and construction efforts that provided temporary employment for some 50,000 men and women in all 13 districts of the island nation. This Transitional Employment Program was considered one of the speediest and most effective assistance programs in the post-referendum period. It not only pumped resources into a cash-starved economy but also provided training in skills that could be used in future employment.

In **Burundi,** local leaders from marginalized areas in the provinces of Gitega and Ruyigi, trained through OTI's Community-based Peace and Reconciliation Initiative (CPRI), helped mobilize their communities for local elections in September 2005. OTI estimates that 25,000 citizens attended activities to promote participation in the elections. Supervised by CPRI-trained leaders, activities during the two-day period before the elections included songs, dance, parades, games, sports, and poetry. The mobilization activities also introduced newly elected government officials to the population, sometimes for the first time. Many citizens found that this was their first opportunity to interact with their new leaders. Held after successful presidential, legislative, senatorial, and communal elections earlier that year, the local elections were the final official element of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Accord. The peace agreement ended a decade-long period of violent conflict in Burundi that was ignited by the assassination of the president after the country's previous election in 1993. One participant from Butezi Commune in Ruyigi Province said, "If we had had these trainings, activities, and sense of solidarity and responsibility as a community in 1993, things would be different for Burundi today. We will not forget these lessons as we move forward in peace."

TRANSPARENT AND RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE

One of the keys to a stable peace is having a well-managed, accountable government that adheres to basic democratic principles, respects human rights, is responsive to the needs and concerns of its citizens, and is able to deliver timely and effective services. States in transition often need new processes and mechanisms to replace structures that are crippled by bureaucratic red tape or that enable corrupt practices. In countries recovering from significant destruction due to war or natural disaster, even the most basic supplies—paper, desks, chairs, windows, and computers—can make the difference between perseverance and collapse. To strengthen the capacity of transitional administrations to respond to urgent needs, OTI provides grants that finance construction materials and office equipment and fund training and technical advice for government staff. It also supports the activities of anticorruption advocates and develops incentives for transparent business practice by host-country governments.

Many OTI projects that are designed to facilitate citizen-government engagement on governance issues are implemented through civil society partners, primarily as a way to help small organizations increase their visibility and administrative capacity. When OTI implements similar projects through a government partner, it offers the government an opportunity to demonstrate its own commitment to openness and transparency.

Responding to citizens' needs is an integral part of good governance; both central and local government units of countries in transition, like **Sudan,** must prove that they can deliver services rapidly and effectively. An OTI-supported activity in Sudan provides an excellent example of a government ministry using a community-based approach to improving governance. Despite a wealth of natural resources, the government of Southern Kordofan, an ethnically diverse and political divided state astride the former frontline of Sudan's north-south civil war, has struggled to stimulate sufficient equitable local development after decades of violent conflict. After the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2005, local reformers created the Ministry of Rural Development and Water Resources (MRDWR) to promote development that reflects the economic and social needs of the state's citizens, thereby helping to secure peace. In late 2007, in partnership with MRDWR, OTI funded the establishment of Community Development Centers (CDCs) in three provincial towns. As a new and reform-minded ministry, MRDWR is piloting CDCs as a way to counteract centralized development planning and the long exclusion of communities from decision-making processes. The centers give local authorities a platform to engage communities in discussions on development priorities. To complement creation of the CDCs, OTI funded an ambitious three-month training course on participatory methods for planning and implementing development projects, in which 120 officials from the state's 10 ministries participated. The MRDWR's bottom-up approach resulted in closer collaboration between government authorities, local leaders, and community-based organizations as they make plans for essential infrastructure and services, such as health, clean water, and education.

OTI expanded the capacity of the **Iraqi** government at many levels by improving communication between government officials and constituents, building direct links between local and national authorities, and increasing accountability for government decisions and processes. Initially, grant activities focused on ensuring that government entities had the proper facilities, equipment, and supplies to carry out their functions. OTI then expanded activities that helped both government officials and Iraqi citizens learn about their rights and responsibilities in a democracy. Through their participation in OTI-sponsored workshops, conferences, opinion polls, and town meetings, Iraqis now have an opportunity to voice their views and express their expectations for the current and future governments in a constructive way.

In **Liberia,** mass looting before UN security forces arrived in Monrovia in 2003 literally stripped government institutions down to their walls and foundations. Many government offices still had not fully recovered by the time of the late-2005 election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first democratically elected female head of state in African history. In response to the unique opportunity presented by the formation of President Johnson Sirleaf's reform-minded government, OTI quickly modified its program, the Liberia Transition Initiative (LTI), and the Building Recovery and Reform through Democratic Governance (BRDG) Initiative in Liberia. This second phase strengthened the capacity of newly staffed government ministries and offices in such areas as effective planning, budgeting, communication, and coordination with counterparts. Immediately after the election, the program began at the top, providing technical support to organize the Office of the Presidency, train its staff, and set the office up with communications, informational technology, and basic equipment. In fact, one of BRDG-Liberia's most noteworthy grants was to construct and equip a radio studio in the President's offices so that addresses by or interviews with her could be rebroadcast by any radio station using a simple relay. This support helped the administration better organize and direct government ministries, act as a stronger counterpart to the development community on larger-scale programs and projects, and formulate more effective political responses to high-visibility challenges.

Jose Azel/Aurora Photos

Northern **Uganda** is emerging from years of conflict that caused much of the population to flee their homes for the relative security of camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). While Northern Uganda has become increasingly peaceful since hostilities ceased between the Government of Uganda (GOU) and the Lord's Resistance Army in 2006, many IDPs remain reluctant to leave the camps and return to their homes. In mid-2008, OTI launched the Northern Uganda Transition Initiative (NUTI) to help the GOU provide services to northern Ugandans and increase the capacity of the media to cover the transition to peace and recovery. As part of its initial support, OTI funded two ceremonies organized by the Gulu District Government to mark the transition of authority for service delivery from IDP camp managers to elected local leaders. The ceremonies gave the Gulu District Government an opportunity to formally thank more than 140 camp commanders for their work during the conflict, highlight the importance of the local council system, and demonstrate government leadership in service delivery. The OTI grant allowed the local government to provide gifts of appreciation to the camp commanders and arrange transportation and logistics. The events marked an important transition point in the GOU's effort to reestablish functioning local government in former conflict areas and to increase confidence among IDPs that they will be secure and prosperous if they return home.

OTI/Sudan

" OTI must continue to challenge its own assumptions, to evolve into new areas where it can contribute to the entire U.S. government effort to encourage stability and democracy."

LEGACY

" The innovator is not an opponent of the old, but a proponent of the new."
— Lyle E. Schaller

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

OTI is engaged in the efforts of U.S. government policymakers to reform the organization, planning, and implementation of foreign assistance to strategically align resources with U.S. foreign policy objectives. One critical aspect of this effort is to make resources more adaptable to meet the demands posed by short-term crises in pre and postconflict countries. As the U.S. government continues to explore new approaches to foreign assistance, OTI is sharing its experiences and lessons learned with colleagues within USAID and State, at USAID Missions abroad, and with international counterparts.

As priorities change, USAID missions and offices are continually reviewing best practices that can make their programs more effective. Missions have adopted some OTI business practices, methodology, and even culture into their programmatic structures. Recent examples where Missions have adopted and synthesized OTI practices, programs, or personnel include Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Liberia, Haiti, Colombia, Venezuela, West Bank/Gaza, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These Missions continue their longstanding objectives of promoting economic, social, and institutional development while at the same time exploring ways to adapt operations to create more flexibility and efficiency in responding in the short term to rapidly changing events.

Adding to the toolkit of options that may be applied in international development initiatives, OTI country activities reinforce the notion that foreign assistance can be fast and flexible, politically relevant, responsive to national security concerns, and capable of carrying out timely projects that advance diplomatic goals.

LESSONS LEARNED

Fifteen years of experience with addressing complex postconflict and crisis scenarios have illuminated a number of clear lessons, as well as opportunities for improvement, related to political transition programming. For example, even modest amounts of strategically

Transitions are dynamic environments that present opportunities to shift the balance of power and the center of political gravity toward forces favoring peace and democratic governance.

placed resources can help, if not solidify, a transition. To be effective, this type of support requires an unconventional approach to strategic planning and programming that embraces tactical flexibility, continually recognizes opportunities in chaotic situations, and employs creative and responsive tools that can serve multiple functions when new opportunities present themselves.

OTI has also learned that while successful transitions require a consistent commitment of time, resources, and political fortitude over many years, the course and viability of the transition can be set early on. OTI's two to three-year programming mandate reflects a belief that the direction, momentum, and character of a major transition are often shaped in its first few years.

Transitions are dynamic environments that present opportunities to shift the balance of power and the center of political gravity toward forces favoring peace and democratic governance. Capitalizing on these opportunities may involve supporting politically significant but often repressed or underrepresented segments of society. In some countries, the most effective way to support a transition is by helping the "silent majority" find its voice, connect with like-minded citizens, and mobilize.

When it defines goals for a new country program, OTI analyzes both its value added and its own limitations. While programs should have ambitious goals, an overstated strategy can build unrealistic expectations and result in a poorly executed program. More modest, clearly targeted objectives stem from an effort to set realistic objectives and acknowledge that OTI is but one tactical tool out of many variables that further political transition.

PROGRAM HANDOVER

At the end of a program, a challenge for OTI country engagements is coordinating handover to the USAID mission. Programmatic efforts have more impact when the Mission is able to continue supporting the same local partners or activities after OTI has departed. OTI learned these lessons during its earliest program experiences in Angola and Haiti: effective political transitions take time, and an effective handover is necessary to ensure lasting impact.

The handover process does not wait to begin during the closeout phase. Within the first year, OTI programs must begin planning an exit strategy. This requires close collaboration with USAID Missions and Regional Bureaus to help ensure that the program's short-term objectives become part of the Mission's overall country strategy, and its approach is understood and supported by USAID counterparts. As part of the coordination effort, OTI representatives sign memoranda of understanding with Mission Directors that outline roles and responsibilities and reinforce regular channels of communication.

One measure of the success of OTI's collaboration with Missions and Regional Bureaus has been its ability to hand over entire programs, project activities,

OTI/Nepal

and even staff to country Missions in the majority of its programs in the past five years, among them programs in Sri Lanka, East Timor, Indonesia, Congo, Burundi, Liberia, Haiti, and Bolivia.

The importance of a smooth handover is evident at the grant activity level as well. By helping nontraditional grantees, such as informal student groups, local leaders, and communities themselves, establish a track record of effectiveness in carrying out individual projects, OTI draws them to the attention of potential donors who can continue support. In fact, it is now customary during the three-month program closeout phase for OTI country staff to recommend continued support for successful grantees not only to relevant Mission strategic objective teams but also to non-USAID donors and international organizations.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

OTI's ability to innovate and respond as circumstances change enhances the effectiveness of U.S. foreign assistance by adapting to the evolving foreign policy priorities and development goals of the U.S. government. As the U.S. government continues to build its ability to respond to fragile states, instability, and challenges to democracy, OTI will be part of this effort and continue to refine its programmatic skills and strategies.

Coordination with U.S. government agencies as well as with local and international counterparts will be vital to OTI's future success. Another challenge will be to continue operations in insecure environments where access and mobility are limited without putting U.S. and local staff at risk. As OTI continues to grow and streamline the programmatic and operational systems that support its country programs, it must ensure that the programs can stay flexible, innovative, and effective with minimal bureaucratic encumbrances.

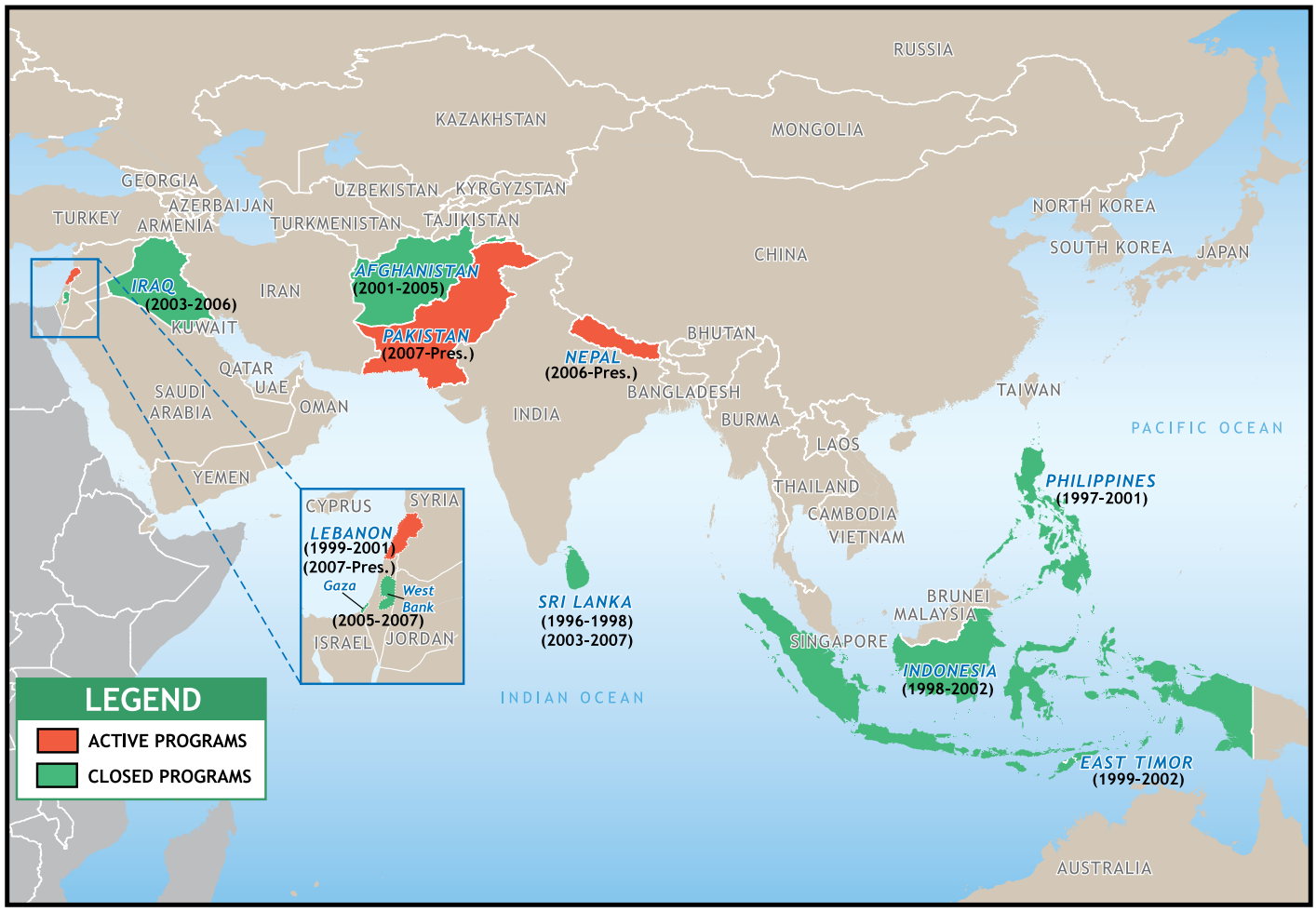
Finally, OTI must continue to challenge its own assumptions, to evolve into new areas where it can contribute to the entire U.S. government effort to encourage stability and democracy, and to always assume there are new approaches and new methodologies to be discovered that can make its country programs even more effective and dynamic.

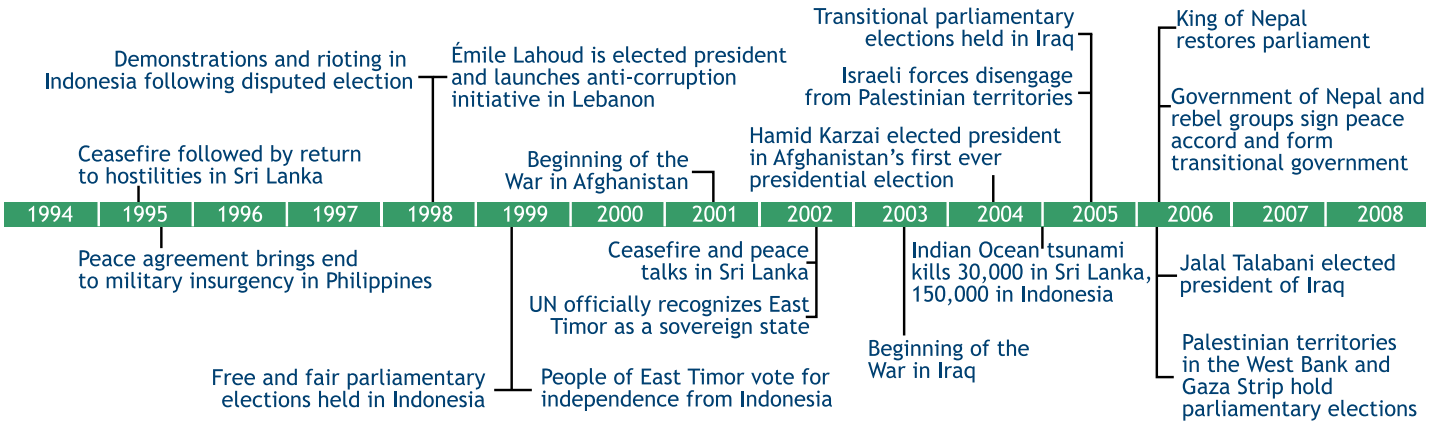
Jose Azel/Aurora Photos

" To be effective, [OTI programming] requires an unconventional approach to strategic planning and programming that embraces tactical flexibility, continually recognizes opportunities in chaotic situations, and employs creative and responsive tools that can serve multiple functions when new opportunities present themselves."

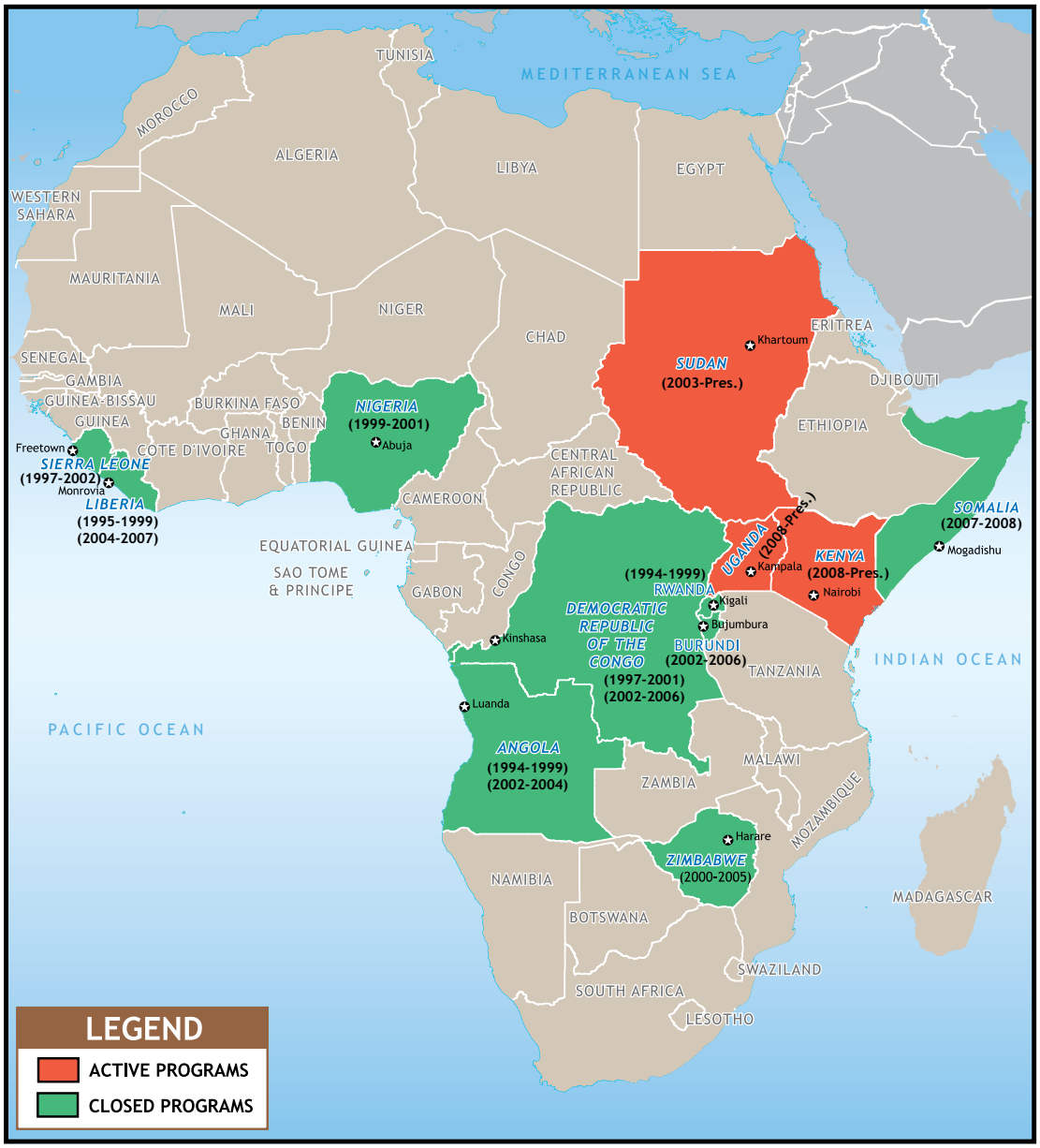
MAPS

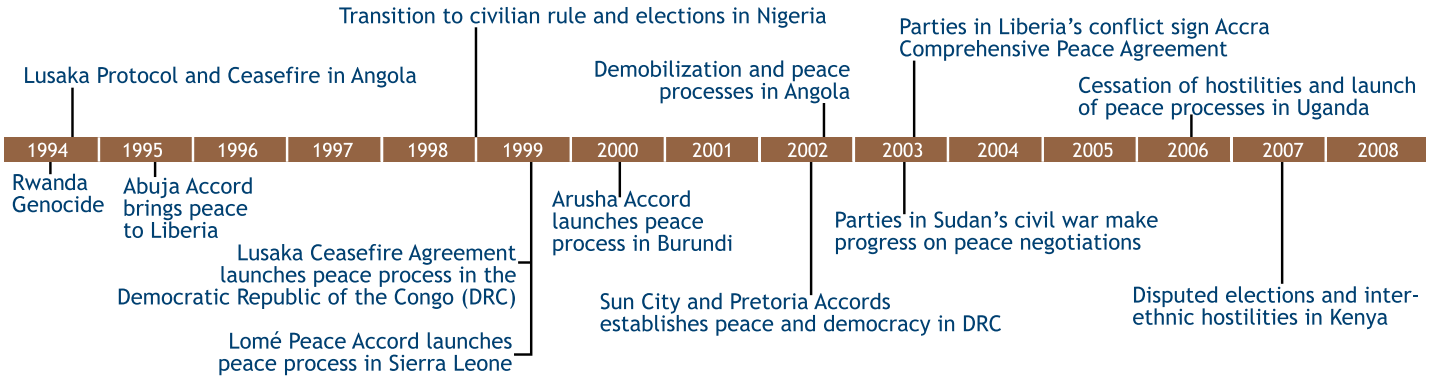
OTI IN ASIA & MIDDLE EAST (AME): FISCAL YEARS 1994-2009





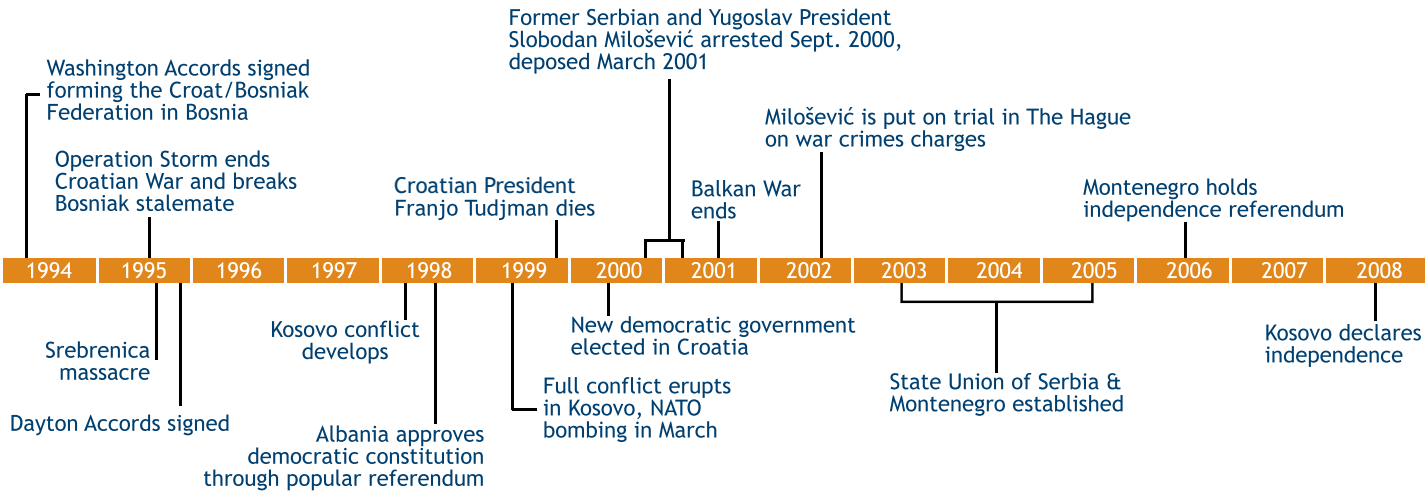
OTI IN AFRICA (AFR):
FISCAL YEARS 1994-2009





OTI IN LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN (LAC):
FISCAL YEARS 1994-2009

OTI IN EUROPE AND EURASIA (E&E):
FISCAL YEARS 1994-2009



This publication was prepared by the Office of Transition Initiatives. More information about OTI programs can be found on the USAID website—usaid.gov—through the keyword "OTI".

U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20523-1000
Telephone: 202-712-4810
Fax: 202-216-3524
www.usaid.gov

PD-ACM-300