



SUCCESS STORY

Sharing the Message of Peace in the Eastern Terai



Visitors receive information on the CPA at the "Peace Stall" at a commercial fair in Itahari, Sunsari District.



A student artist discusses her entry at the Drawing for Peace exhibition.

USAID/NEPAL

April 2008 – In the months before the April 10 Constituent Assembly elections, Nepal’s eastern Terai experienced a wave of criminal violence and civil disturbances that threatened to delay the polls for a third time. Ethnic clashes erupted throughout the region, threatening to push the country back into a state of turmoil and derail the peace process. The violence also hindered the ability to disseminate accurate election information in many areas.

In response to the increased unrest, USAID/OTI provided support to a nongovernmental organization (NGO) based in Itahari, Sunsari District, to engage residents positively in the peace process through commercial, cultural, and educational events. To reach the business community, the NGO established a "Peace Stall" at an annual commercial fair to distribute information about the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). More than 42,000 people registered at the stall, talked to the organizers about their rights, and received information on the CPA, including posters and handbooks detailing the rights granted under the agreement.

To further ease tensions in the region, the grantee organized cultural dance and song events, enlisting 40 local ethnic groups to entertain with traditional dancing and music. More than 24,000 people attended these events where the entertainers interspersed new songs promoting peace and communal harmony among the traditional offerings. Participants and attendees, all of whom received pamphlets on the CPA, felt that the events helped to enhance communal harmony while recognizing some of the cultures that are disappearing from the Sunsari District.

In addition, the NGO held a Drawing for Peace competition for high school students. The winning artwork was displayed at a community exhibition, and the one-day event proved so popular that it was held over for a second day. In the end, more than 14,000 people visited the exhibition. Students also participated in an essay competition that focused on the peace process.

All of the events received widespread coverage in local and regional newspapers, and the winning essay writers were invited to read their essays on local radio stations. Because of the favorable response to the student competitions, USAID/OTI is funding a calendar that features the winning essays and drawings.

In August 2006, the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) began a program in Nepal to bolster the current peace process, strengthen governance mechanisms, and support positive, nonviolent community engagement in the country’s political, social, and economic future. The objectives of the program are to:

1. *Increase access to information and diversify public debate on issues critical to political transition, and*
2. *Increase the effectiveness of key political transition institutions.*