



SUCCESS STORY

Modern Techniques Enhance Traditional Conflict-Solving Skills



Participants in the training program engaged actively in small-group discussions and role-playing exercises.

ACORD's OTI-supported program provided training on alternative dispute resolution to 35 influential leaders from eastern Sudan's Red Sea State, an area experiencing intense competition for limited resources.

January 2009 – Following a decade of low-level conflict in eastern Sudan, the Sudanese Government signed a peace agreement with regional opposition parties in October 2006.

However, the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement has not yet resulted in transparent, locally controlled government, and the devastation caused by the resource-focused conflicts, along with drought and the confiscation of land and water for commercial agriculture and mining, has engendered a deep sense of despair among indigenous communities in the region.

Accordingly, to strengthen the capacity of eastern communities to effectively advocate for implementation of the agreement, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) provided support to the Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (ACORD).

In November 2008, ACORD organized a nine-day training program on peaceful conflict transformation for 35 leaders from Red Sea State. The program targeted traditional and religious leaders as well as representatives of community-based organizations and village development committees. During a series of discussions, group work, and role-playing exercises, participants were introduced to various methods of alternative dispute resolution, including negotiation and mediation skills and strategies.

Conflict-solving methods are not new to eastern Sudan, as traditional mediators, known as the *Galad*, have resolved disputes in the region for generations. Nevertheless, civil society leaders recognized the need to build on traditional practices and transfer the skills of the *Galad* to a younger cohort.

Differing perspectives were apparent during the workshops. For example, in discussions on the main source of conflict in the East—i.e., land—the younger leaders were better able to envision win-win scenarios, while their elders remained ensnared in thinking that excluded these options. On the other hand, the youths tended to be impatient, finding it difficult to understand and accept that communities need time to change attitudes and behaviors shaped by prolonged conflicts.

By supporting ACORD and other peace-building organizations, USAID/OTI is promoting the emergence of an empowered civil society that can effectively mitigate conflict and advocate for the implementation of Sudan's peace agreements.