



SUCCESS STORY

Airstrip Helps Development Take Flight in Southern Blue Nile



A pilot's-eye view of the newly rehabilitated airstrip in Kurmuk.

USAID/OTI recently funded the rehabilitation and extension of the Kurmuk airstrip, enabling year-round access to one of Blue Nile State's most isolated and war-affected areas.

June 2008 – USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) funded the rapid rehabilitation and extension of Kurmuk's airstrip last month, enabling year-round access to one of Sudan's most isolated and war-affected regions.

The southern areas of Blue Nile State have been devastated by decades of armed conflict and government neglect. Even after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, the region remains cut off from the rest of state for nearly half of each year, as seasonal rains leave the roads impassable. A lack of reliable access to Kurmuk has stymied economic growth and hindered efforts by the government and aid agencies to expand essential services in the area. Consequently, many residents view the peace agreement with skepticism, as well as the government's

pledges to counter southern Blue Nile's historic marginalization.

When it became clear that initiatives planned by other donors were not going to materialize before the annual rains, USAID/OTI stepped in with eleventh-hour support for the rehabilitation and extension of the Kurmuk airstrip. A construction company quickly set to work, extending the dirt airstrip by 500 yards, resurfacing the existing 700 yards with a new layer of gravel, and improving drainage. The project was completed in record time, and planes began landing on the new airstrip just five weeks after USAID/OTI approved funding. As a result of this activity, the airstrip will remain open during the rainy season, with only occasional rain closures.

Kurmuk's newly rehabilitated airstrip permits the year-round delivery of peace dividends to the region. In collaboration with local authorities and partner nongovernmental organizations, USAID/OTI can now continue increasing access to healthcare services in towns throughout southern Blue Nile, rather than suspending activities until the next window of dry weather, as was customary in the past. Improved access not only facilitates the provision of much-needed social services but also allows the state government to increase its presence in Kurmuk and further demonstrate its commitment to constituents in this formerly marginalized area.

USAID/OTI remains committed to supporting the efforts of local authorities to address the causes and consequences of political neglect and violence in one of Sudan's most contested regions.