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SUCCESS STORY

Aweil's New Legislative Assembly: The Best Building in Town



The newly extended and rehabilitated state assembly building and legislative chamber for Northern Bahr el Ghazal.

The parliament building, rehabilitated by USAID has “helped legislators realize their importance in representing the citizens of Northern Bahr el Ghazal.”

—Assembly Speaker

August 2007 – The state legislative assembly chamber in Aweil is bright and spacious and large enough to accommodate the public during discussions and heated debates. Parliamentarians, 25 percent of whom are women, meet there on a regular basis to discuss issues affecting Northern Bahr el Ghazal, review budgets, and plan the delivery of basic services such as education and health care. However, it was not always so.

USAID/OTI recently rehabilitated and extended the assembly building after learning that government efforts to ensure the peaceful reintegration of large numbers of displaced people were being hindered by the lack of adequate facilities to conduct business. Nearly four million southerners were displaced during Sudan’s civil war,

and Northern Bahr el Ghazal, located along the conflict’s political fault line, was one of the more severely affected regions. Many of the local Dinka fled north to Darfur, where they stayed for years.

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 created an opportunity for the displaced citizens to come home. Returns began in earnest in 2006, following a series of targeted attacks on Dinka settlements and due to the general deterioration of security in Darfur. Thousands of returnees have poured into Aweil, where the government is working resolutely to provide basic services and ease the returnees’ transition.

Furthermore, with the assembly sessions now open to the public, many citizens have a chance – for the first time – to become involved in local political processes. One of the first bills passed when the assembly reconvened reduced the number of civil servants in the state’s inflated workforce. The new transparency increases dialogue and trust between citizens and their representatives.

By rehabilitating the state assembly building, which is commonly acknowledged as the best building in town, and through other relevant activities, USAID/OTI is supporting the emergence of a responsive and effective government in Northern Bahr el Ghazal during the region’s transition to peace.