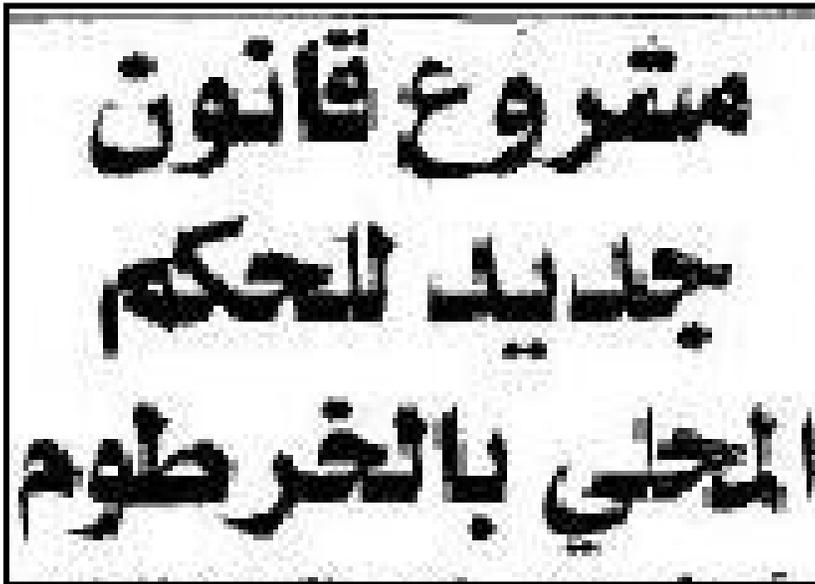




SUCCESS STORY

Activists Propose Revisions to Local Governance Law



Front-page headline from a Sudanese newspaper report on key legal reforms proposed by civil society experts.

With support from USAID/OTI, civil society activists revised the State of Khartoum's local governance law and launched a public awareness campaign to generate debate on it.

November 2007 – By signing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 and by adopting the Interim National Constitution (INC) shortly thereafter, the Government of Sudan expressed its commitment to a transition to democracy. Nevertheless, progress on creating a framework for this transition – including the drafting and approval of new laws that are consistent with the CPA and basic human rights principles – has been slow. A few of the needed reforms have been addressed; however, for the most part, debate on key legislation has been discouraged and opposition voices silenced.

To encourage progress on this front, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives supported a group of 35 civil society activists who have

experience with legal reform and the legislative process to review and update the State of Khartoum's local governance law. The law determines the administrative structure of the state, identifies the financial resources available to it, and defines electoral districts. The current governance law, adopted in 1998, has been used to weaken opposition and promote a narrow political agenda.

With guidance from a Sudanese nongovernmental organization (NGO), the group, which included lawyers, journalists, academics, and trade unionists, drafted a new local governance law, ensuring that all of its articles were in accordance with the CPA and the INC. Subsequently, the NGO launched a media campaign to publicize the draft law and generate public debate on it.

Unfortunately, when Khartoum's Legislative Assembly gathered in September to address the local governance law, a majority of its members refused to negotiate on the basis of the draft document. In addition, key elements of the draft were tabled by members of opposition parties. A proposal to prevent the establishment of new municipal jurisdictions – which create an additional, and unnecessary, layer of taxation and the need for additional electoral districts – was denied. On the other hand, several articles in a newly approved law reflect the group's recommendations. For example, the law now requires that employees be selected based on technical criteria rather than appointed by administrators. Overall, the successes are meaningful and provide Sudan's civil society with encouragement in its efforts to promote the country's interim constitution and advance democratic transformation.