



MONTHLY UPDATE

September 2009

Civil Society Organizations Educate Community about Election Process

Three civil society organizations based in Central Equatoria state – Mugwo Youth Association (MUYA), Payawa Scholarship Scheme (PASS) and Kanda Ya Nini – recently conducted an event in Mugwo Payam to raise awareness about the 2010 elections. All three organizations are partners in Mercy Corps’ Localizing Institutional Capacity in Southern Sudan (LINCSS) program, funded by USAID.

“We need to make sure that our community is aware. We really need to make an effort and ensure that people understand the election process fully,” said Noel Malish Scopas, Program Officer for MUYA.

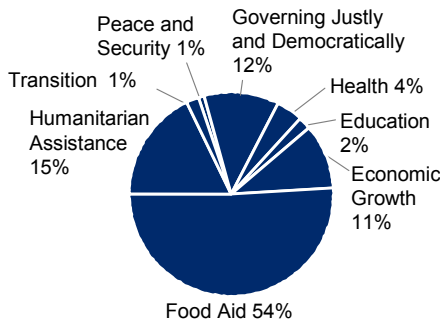
Earlier this year, MUYA, PASS, and Kanda Ya Nini participated in an interregional conference organized by Mercy Corps in Leer, Unity state, about the role of civil society in peaceful elections. On the final day, groups coming from the same region created action plans for disseminating and sharing with their communities what they had learned at the conference. It was at this session that the three organizations agreed to conduct a joint event to inform the people of Mugwo Payam about next year’s national elections.



Noah Malish Scopas, Program Officer for Mugwo Youth Association (MUYA). Photo: Mercy Corps



**USAID ASSISTANCE TO SUDAN
FY 2008, ESTIMATED**



Peace and Security	\$9.4*
Governing Justly and Democratically	\$118.3*
Health	\$40.8
Education	\$20.4
Economic Growth	\$103.8
Food Aid	\$512.9
Humanitarian Assistance	\$140.6
Transition	\$8.9
TOTAL	\$955.1

Note: Amounts in millions

* Funds managed jointly with U.S. Department of State



Upon returning home, these three groups worked hard to pull the event together. They focused on getting a good turnout. “Although written invitation letters were distributed, due to a high illiteracy rate in Mugwo, organization members made public announcements in market areas to reach those who might have received a letter but could not fully comprehend its content,” Noel said.

More than 100 people came to learn about the elections, exceeding the organizers’ hopes regarding attendance. The event provided attendees with much-needed background information including basic principles of democracy and good governance and an overview of the electoral process. The half-day event attracted men, women and youth from the area, as well as local government authorities, chiefs, teachers, and community-based groups.

“Participants reflected on a time in Sudan when there was only one candidate,” said Noel. “Our leaders would simply instruct us who to vote for. There were no options like there are today.”

Although people were pleased with the knowledge gained from this event, there was a strong request from the majority of attendees for additional practical

information including how the voting will actually take place. Given the time constraints, the organizers were only able to answer with some very basic information about the registration process, party symbols, and how to mark ballots correctly.

The three organizations are looking forward to working together again to cover the rest of these issues in more detail. “Currently we’re working on forming an election coalition where we can put into place issues related to dialogues and trainings. We are hoping to use the coalition to go into more depth with these topics,” said Noel.

For the three groups, organizing this event was a tangible first step in sharing crucial information gleaned from their experiences with those who do not have similar opportunities.

“The thing that is very important about our partnership with PASS and Kanda Ya Nini,” said Noel, “is that it cements the unity of civil society organizations. Everyone is welcome and we can all discuss freely how to do something together. It is not as if this is being imposed on us from the outside, but rather we are doing what we choose to do.” ♦

Support for Peace, Stability and Democracy

On June 15, officials from the United States Government and the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) held their first Partnership Conference. This conference brought together representatives from USAID and the State Department based in Juba, Khartoum and Washington, along with more than 30 GOSS Ministers, Commissioners, Undersecretaries and other representatives.

The two parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to reinforce their partnership and to reconfirm the \$203 million in funding that is part of an overall Regional Assistance Grant Agreement signed between USAID and the GOSS in September 2008.

The MOU recognizes U.S. support for GOSS priority development sectors that expand employment and improve sustainable livelihoods; increase access to health care, including HIV/AIDS and malaria treatment and prevention; expand access to education through interactive radio and gender equity scholarships and other programs; and further the rule of law and good governance, while preparing for national elections in 2010. Planned and ongoing activities will further the development of crucial infrastructure; build human and institutional capacity; increase citizen access to accurate and reliable information; and develop systems for participatory governance, accountability, and transparency.



USAID's Earl Gast and Minister for Regional Cooperation Oyai Deng Ajak at the GOSS Partnership Conference. Photo: Jenn Warren



Resource Centers Bring Health Information to Southern Sudan

As a public health officer at the Southern Sudan Ministry of Health, Abdullah Rahman needed up-to-date information to support his work. Even in the capital city of Juba, it wasn't easy to find what he was looking for. "We used to look in our books and the libraries at the ministries, or friends' books—but it is difficult, because some information you cannot find there." Reliable Internet access was another complication. "It's important for us to connect with other people," he says, and for "any news from our partners, we connect by Internet."

In Southern Sudan, IntraHealth's Capacity Project, funded by USAID, is strengthening the Ministry of Health's ability to hire, train and manage a high-quality health work force. One objective is to implement a strategic approach to work force development, which includes improving access to health information. The Juba Teaching Hospital Health Information Resource Center, which opened in May 2008, is part of these efforts.

The resource center provides hospital staff, medical students and Ministry of Health personnel with print and electronic materials, library services, Internet access and computer training. The center has seven computers, all of which are connected to a wireless Internet network. The current collection of 653 items includes medical textbooks, journals, magazines, novels, videos, DVDs and CDs.

Francis Tombe is the center's manager and librarian. "Before the resource center was established," he remembers, "there was nothing." Even at the University of Juba, "most of their materials are for academic purposes," he points out, while "most of our materials are on medical subjects."

In the beginning, it wasn't easy for Tombe to convince staff to visit the center and use the materials. "When I came here," Tombe recounts, "you find it is very hard to encourage people to use the center; there is a poor reading culture. But I go around and encourage people. I keep telling them they should come, these books are very recent." Gradually he succeeded, and now "we normally get about 16 to 24 people [a day]." He adds that "the school of nursing and midwifery is immediately across the street. They come and use the resource center."



*Juba Teaching Hospital Information Resource Center.
Photo: IntraHealth International*

The center provides free computer training to hospital staff for a period of 45 days.

"So far the center has trained about 20 medical staff in basic computer knowledge," says Tombe. The training sessions cover an introduction to computers, Microsoft Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint, as well as Internet and e-mail skills. Hospital administrators selected the trainees from a range of departments; they are now able to access health information through various Web sites, obtain updates and enter patient and hospital data into databases. Rahman notes that "you cannot find this training anywhere outside this center. This training helps the staff with tools to assist them in doing their jobs."

Due to the resource center's success, a second site is in the works. The state hospital in Wau, capital of the state of Western Bahr el-Ghazal, hosts a new resource center opened in July. The center will be staffed by local hospital personnel, with support and training from Francis Tombe. As in Juba, the resource center will help reinforce the staff's medical training, provide a means for continuing education and professional development and offer free Internet access. According to Undersecretary of Health Dr. Monywiir Arop Kuol, the Juba Teaching Hospital Health Information Resource Center "ushers in a new era, an era of Southern Sudan becoming part of the world. The significance of this is actually giving us the ability to acquire information, and of course someone who has given you information has really given you power." ♦



Mothers listen to educational radio programs outside Maridi Civil Hospital. Photo: Education Development Center

Radio, Volunteer Educators Spread Health News

Mary Linda Simon has become a volunteer health educator in her community in Maridi, Western Equatoria. During her free time, the 18-year-old-mother of two teaches fellow women to maintain personal and environmental hygiene to prevent diseases.

When she goes to the borehole, which is more than once a day, Linda talks to other women about the importance of hygiene in the home. She encourages them to keep their water storage as well as cooking utensils clean. The women use jerry cans to draw and keep water, and have cooking pots and pans to cook food. Linda tells the women that if they keep such utensils clean and if they cover food, they can prevent themselves and their children from contracting diseases.

Linda is thankful for the “Learning English” series on local radio, one of the educational radio programs designed and produced by the Southern Sudan Interactive Radio Instruction (SSIRI) project, which is part of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. The program receives funds from USAID and assistance from Education Development Center. The English series provides language instruction to youth and adults. Although the content

focuses on English, it includes important health topics as well.

Evans Sebit, a teacher working as a scriptwriter with SSIRI, explains that in the health segments, “Learning English” teaches about diseases that are common in the region, such as malaria, yellow fever, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. “The benefit of this health segment is that for too long, Southern Sudan has been lagging behind due to the war, and people were not sensitized on public health matters. We feel that if people were informed, it would be easy to prevent some of the deaths as most of the diseases are easily preventable,” explained Sebit.

Linda started listening to the English series about four months ago and was so impressed by the program that she convinced her husband to buy a radio. Today she does not want to miss a single radio lesson. Ironically, the first time she heard the program was in hospital. “My son had been admitted to Maridi Civil Hospital due to severe malaria,” Linda recalls. While she was seated outside the children’s ward with other women, someone tuned in to the program. On this particular day the program had a segment on the cause and prevention of malaria. “During the lesson I learned that sleeping under a mosquito net can prevent the spread of malaria,” she remembers. “I wish I had heard this information much earlier,” she said.

Before she moved to Maridi, Linda used to live in the neighboring county of Mvolo, which does not receive SSIRI broadcasts. Her two children often fell sick with malaria, which meant she was in and out of hospital at least a dozen times every year. Linda is amazed that after she asked her husband to buy a mosquito net for the children and he agreed, the children no longer become sick as often as they used to. “I know it was because I and my husband were ignorant that our children were falling sick all the time,” she concludes.

Linda dropped out of school at the age of 17 and understands English better than most women in her area. Although she admits that the program has helped her improve her English language skills, Linda attaches more value to the health topics. “Whenever I learn something from the radio lesson, I always try to share it with the other women in our neighborhood. Sometimes I listen to the program with other women who don’t know English and I translate into Zande so they can understand.” She is happy that she can help others to protect their families from diseases.



Linda laments the rate at which young girls get pregnant in Maridi, and wishes that the producers of the “Learning English” program would cover reproductive health too. “It would help these young girls who are mothers of the next generation to avoid early pregnancies and stay in school longer. They would also avoid contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases,” she added.

Just like Linda, other women are appreciative of radio-based health education. Vaidah Keneth is a “Learning English” facilitator at the New Sudan Women Association offices located at Gbutala Secondary School in Maridi. She has listened to the English series since it first began to be broadcast in 2007. The 32-year-old mother says the most important information she got from the “Learning English” broadcast is about the spread and prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Like Linda, Vaidah has been encouraging girls and young women to listen to the programs. She would like to see the English series sensitizing communities on the importance of educating children.

In the meantime, it’s clear that as Southern Sudan emerges from the ruins of civil war, interactive radio instruction is improving educational quality in primary school classrooms and adult learning centers, and informing individual listeners. A major challenge is that some areas are unable to listen to the SSIRI programs, as the FM broadcasts reach only a few towns in Southern Sudan and the Three Areas. To help overcome this limitation, SSIRI Chief of Party Tom Tilson says the project is beginning to provide low-cost digital technologies such as MP3 players with speakers for those who live in communities without a radio station, and for groups that meet at times that do not coincide with the broadcast schedule. ♦

Mending Fences: Civic Organizations in Action

Students at the Kurmuk Model School in Sudan’s Blue Nile State recently learned how a small amount of support and some collaborative efforts by community members can make a world of difference for a school.

After experiencing heavy conflict during more than two decades of war, the Kurmuk community has placed its aspirations for prolonged peace on educating its children. So, when the school fence

was destroyed not once, but twice, the community rallied to rebuild it.

Kurmuk Model School sits in the heart of the town marketplace, and without a fence, was subjected to vandalism and misuse of property. Stray animals entered the school grounds to graze.

The level of disruption to the school’s 600 pupils and 14 teachers threatened student learning. In response, the community – mobilized by the school’s Parent Teacher Association (PTA) – built the fence with a small grant from the USAID-funded Health, Education and Reconciliation Sudan Project (HEAR Sudan). The project is implemented by Creative Associates International, Inc.



Community members spare no effort in rebuilding the Kurmuk Model School fence. Photo: Creative Associates International

One of the main components of HEAR Sudan is to strengthen community support for school governance and outreach through conflict avoidance and resolution strategies. An element of this includes explaining the role of groups such as PTAs in their association with local communities, often serving in the role of a community arbiter.

The fence was rebuilt, but much to everyone’s disappointment, it was soon destroyed by military forces, whose vehicles knocked it down again. “It takes minutes or seconds to destroy, but the rebuilding is a big problem,” said Hellen Samia Rajad, the Deputy Headmistress of Kurmuk Model School. “As a mother, it pains me to see the property meant for our children being destroyed.”

The PTA, which was recently trained in civic action by the HEAR Sudan project, organized a meeting with



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community members to find a way to again rebuild the school's destroyed fence. The PTA appealed to the police and ultimately to the governor's office, which requested payment from the military to rebuild the fence.

"We have fought for 31 years, why do we have to fight now?" said Rajad, referring to the military troops who damaged the school's property. "Even if we don't have the power to fight the military, we will make them sit down and listen to us. We have to be one, so we can achieve our goal. We have to continue working very closely with each other, for the sake of the future of our children," she said.

The PTA and community members' efforts paid off and they were successful in getting the parties to acknowledge their responsibility and agree to repair the damaged fence and gate. But only a few months later, a fire broke out at a kiosk selling fuel

near the school. Within minutes, the spreading fire engulfed the Kurmuk Model School's new fence, leaving it a pile of ashes.

Discouraged but undefeated, the school's head teacher and PTA sprang into action. They mobilized the community to bring materials and contribute their labor, and a new fence was put in place within just two days. This was done wholly by the community, without any outside assistance – a testimony to the power of community spirit and the organizational skills gained through Hear Sudan's instruction. The PTA's and community's vigorous but non-violent responses to these incidents are a good indication that the project is achieving its desired aims. Given that the community is now building latrines for the school, community engagement in social services will foster an increased sense of mutual ownership and responsibility. "HEAR has really done a lot for us," said Rashad proudly. ♦



In 2008, USAID provided over \$512 million in food assistance to vulnerable populations in Sudan. Photo: USAID

World Food Program Sudan Distributions

The United States has been the largest donor of humanitarian assistance to Sudan for more than a quarter century. USAID continues to be the largest donor of food assistance in Sudan – currently providing for the basic food needs of 6.1 million vulnerable people throughout the country.

Since 2004, USAID has provided more than 65 percent of all contributions received by the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) for feeding programs in Sudan and eastern Chad. Despite rampant insecurity and violence, WFP has been consistently able to reach over 90 percent of its target caseload in Darfur each month.

In 2008 alone, USAID provided more than \$512 million in food assistance to WFP and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to support conflict-affected and vulnerable populations in Sudan.

WFP Distributions July 2009

Region	Beneficiaries
Darfur	3,668,875
South	733,153
East	225,485
Three Areas*	225,960
Central	318,459
Total	5,171,932

* The Three Areas are Abyei, Blue Nile, and Southern Kordofan.