



SUCCESS STORY

Dialogue Helps Set Stage for Abyei Boundary Ruling



Misseriya and Dinka leaders gather around the table with experts on cross-border relations.

In advance of the Abyei boundary ruling, USAID/OTI and other donors supported a workshop that brought influential leaders from the region together to discuss innovative cross-border management systems.

August 2009 – In an effort to build a foundation for peaceful acceptance of the Permanent Court of Arbitration’s ruling on Abyei’s boundaries, USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) helped bring together 30 influential Dinka Ngok and Misseriya leaders to discuss cross-border relations.

Abyei’s residents were granted an autonomous administrative system by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005. Yet a protracted deadlock over boundaries stalled implementation of the Abyei Protocol.

The three-day workshop, organized by Concordis International with support from the European Commission, provided an opportunity for the region’s two main ethnic groups to look to the future and consider what kind of border management system would satisfy the development and security needs of both communities. International experts

shared examples of innovative border relations in Africa and Europe, helping participants see that borders do not have to act as barriers, and that ‘soft’ borders can enable the movement of people and goods.

Leaders from the communities expressed their aspirations for peaceful coexistence, as well as their concerns regarding tensions associated with border demarcation and the potential danger of renewed conflict. In the informal environment of the workshop, participants developed common understandings of the challenges they face and produced joint proposals for initiatives that could be undertaken to improve security and humanitarian, economic, political, and social relations across the border.

Abyei is an oil-rich region along Sudan’s contested north-south border. During the civil war, neighboring Misseriya and Dinka Ngok tribesmen were pitted against one another through alliances to the Sudanese Government and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army, respectively. The CPA also granted Abyei a share in the area’s oil revenues, and the right to decide in 2011 whether to remain in the North or join Southern Sudan. Yet the little movement of the Abyei Protocol was generating deep frustration on the ground and threatening collapse of the CPA.

On July 22, the Permanent Court of Arbitration announced its decision to reduce the size of Abyei Area as it was defined by the Abyei Boundaries Commission in 2005. Although enthusiasm was muted, the ruling was tentatively accepted by all sides. The head of the Misseriya Peace Council noted that “the Dinka Ngok and Misseriya are both losers. However, we are also both winners...and this is fair.”

USAID/OTI believes that general acceptance of the borders will provide opportunities for the two tribes to establish new modalities for ensuring peaceful co-existence along Sudan’s north-south border.