



## SUCCESS STORY

### Students Address Conflict with Community Theater



*On a makeshift stage in South Darfur, the action prepares the audience for a discussion on peaceful conflict resolution.*

*“The play shows that revenge cannot raise the dead. It just creates hate and hostility for generations.”*

—Forum Theater trainer

**August 2009** – Angry Darfuri warriors confront the residents of a small community, determined to exact revenge for the murder of a comrade. For onlookers witnessing the event, it is a very tense situation. Meanwhile, in another village, tribal elders struggle to resolve a bitter dispute over land rights, and discover that negotiation brings results. In the moments that follow, actors will step out of their roles and invite the audience to discuss the scenarios.

Welcome to Forum Theater, a performance technique that creates space for public debate on issues that may otherwise be seen as taboo. While the scenes portrayed are not real, they very well could be.

The plays are the result of workshops conducted by local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) specializing in Forum Theater methods. The Darfur Community Strengthening Program, funded by USAID and implemented by the Academy for Educational Development (AED), recently supported four student theater groups in South Darfur as they staged original plays on difficult local topics. The NGOs taught the high school students how to devise and perform dramas that analyze conflict, stimulate debate, and search for peaceful solutions.

In the town of Kubbum, the young actors performed a series of plays for an audience of 300. One of the most popular skits encouraged warring tribes to forgo revenge and instead accept a traditional form of compensation known as *dia*. The young actors depicted how the process of mitigating wrongs with *dia* had broken down in recent years and led to revenge killings that have fueled intertribal conflict. “The play shows that revenge cannot raise the dead,” said Mohamed, a Forum Theater trainer. “It just creates hate and hostility for generations.”

In Nyala, students adopted the perspectives of leaders from nomadic and farming communities as they tried to settle a land dispute. The conflict was eventually resolved through meetings, discussions, and traditional methods of peaceful conflict resolution.

Each troupe plans to stage four more productions in the near future, and the two NGOs conducting the workshops, which were originally trained with support from USAID in 2007, will travel to North Darfur later this month to work with four new groups. In addition, AED will unite some of the troupes for regional competitions and collaboration in the fall. The curtain is rising on these young Forum Theater practitioners and their messages of change.