

## **Partners' Workshop on Bridge Building and Advocacy in Northern Sudan**

In Autumn 2002 a bridge building fund was launched in the Africa division as a catalyst for dialogue between Northern and Southern groups and Southerners in the North of Sudan. This step was taken to challenge partners 'to build peace and justice in a divided society at war' – one of the key objectives in the North Sudan Country Policy and Strategy Paper (CPSP).

The fund was available to all partners who convened after six months to share their experiences with a view towards replicating the successes. Given the learning nature of such an event it was felt that it would be mutually beneficial for other partners to attend who had not used the fund, but who may wish to do so in the future or who were working on peace/bridge building anyway. Training on building advocacy capacity was also cited as a priority.

### **Partners were involved in selecting facilitators and developing the workshop objectives:**

- To encourage partners to share and learn from others' experiences of bridge building and conflict resolution work.
- To encourage networking and learning between partners and between partners and Christian Aid.
- To provide an opportunity to consult partners on the general direction and future of CA's work in Sudan in the context of a possible peace agreement.

The workshop broadly centred on bridge building and advocacy, but it was clear these two themes were closely linked in their relevance to the Sudan context of advocacy and peace. The event was invaluable as a learning exercise for CA staff and partners, allowing CA to learn more about partner priorities in a changing context and enabling partners to gain a better understanding of CA's goals. Partners were also able to hear what others were doing in facilitating future work on bridge building activities.

It was interesting to note that partners seemed much more interested in discussing peace and advocacy at a national, rather than the grassroots, level. This may reflect the results of the CA advocacy baseline survey conducted in 2002 in which 54% of partners' advocacy focused on keeping government/authorities accountable (see Mid Term Report 2.2.7). Another important discussion point was networking, particularly as participants viewed it as something relatively new to Sudan. With emerging networks still in their early stages CA encouraged partners to develop and strengthen these networks rather than looking to create many new ones, as in CA's experience a long-term approach to advocacy networks is generally more effective (see December 2002 report, 2.4.6/11).

The overall success of the workshop was clear from participants desire for further events, in particular the opportunity to share knowledge and experience in a country without a particular 'workshop culture.'

### *Findings and Recommendations*

- More learning initiatives with a continued focus on peace building, networking and developing CA's planning in alliance with partners would be beneficial.
- Further partner meetings/ workshops in order to develop a more programmatic approach to work in Northern Sudan. Partners expressed their desire to be more involved in planning.
- Some partners suggested that CA should organize more workshops for organizations and individuals outside Khartoum. However, it was recommended that it would be more appropriate and sustainable for CA to support training of trainers – among those partners that are interested in improving capacity in peace and advocacy work outside Khartoum.
- Learning points from workshops should be followed up in future discussions with partners to ensure that learning is implemented.
- Realistic planning is required to ensure that objectives can be met in limited time. However, objectives need to be 'owned' so if participants have not been involved with setting the objectives they need to be revisited at the workshop. This is an essential aspect of rooted advocacy (see December 2002 report 2.4.2).
- Participants commented that the pool of workshop facilitators in Northern Sudan is very small. They recommended that it would be beneficial to encourage the facilitators to work alongside a younger 'trainee' facilitator in order to build capacity and increase the potential pool.