

regard to political or religious affiliations of the applicants. The cross-community composition of the Fund Board, the Secretariat, and the program teams ensures the realization of these principles.

2. Addressing the needs of both communities in Northern Ireland.

In order to comply with British law, the principles under which the Fund was established, and the U.S. Government priorities under which our contributions are made, religious affiliation is not a factor in the approval process. It is generally known, however, which religious majority is predominant within a specific geographical area.

Past program review visits have confirmed that through Fund activities, members of both communities have been able to experience for the first time a working or recreational experience with people of the opposite tradition. Such liaisons have produced cross-community boards of directors (under such organizations as the enterprise centers), cross-community enterprise matchmaking, cross-border joint ventures (such as the Derry-Galway-Boston Trade Fair), and genuine friendships. Other projects, (such as the Shannon-Erne Waterway) have been able to bring people of various communities together to promote their areas and to provide facilities to attract visitors and holiday markets. Because of these improvements, The Waterway Area was awarded a Tourism Award from the British Guild of Travel Writers. The civil servants of both governments in laboring together on the Fund have also developed excellent working, as well as personal, relationships with their counterparts. Such interaction contributes to reconciliation through dialogue and cooperation.

During a program review visit in November of 1994, USAID officials observed that the Fund is highly regarded by moderates from both the Catholic and Protestant communities for the work they have done and the attitudinal changes they have been able to stimulate. The Springboard-training and reconciliation program helps to promote these changes in younger people. This curriculum teaches courses in order to develop vocational training and mixes students from the West Belfast's Catholic and Protestant communities, allowing them to work together. There has been a concerted effort to reach out to those who were skeptical of the Fund activities, specifically in the Protestant communities, and this effort continues.

The Fund has made a concerted effort to direct assistance to the more economically disadvantaged areas. Special programs, such as CRISP, have been developed toward this end. The work of the development consultants is important in assisting the disadvantaged communities to develop ideas and proposals to help themselves through the Fund. The consultants participate in establishing local groups, ensure cross-community participation whenever possible, and assist groups in creating viable projects. In many cases, however, the IFI merely serves as a catalyst for community initiatives that have been developing independently of the Fund. The consultants are also instrumental in contributing to a greater overall understanding and positive perception of the Fund among the people of both communities.

IV. CONCLUSION

A review of Fund activities and a visit to Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland by a senior USAID officer confirmed that the Board of Directors has maintained policies and procedures designed to ensure that both traditions benefit from Fund activities. The Board's operating principles ensure that project decisions are made on the basis of merit. In addition, it has been concluded that Fund resources are being distributed in a manner consistent with its mandate as stated above. All grantees are made aware of the principles of equality of opportunity and nondiscrimination in employment, stipulated by acceptance of any grant monies.