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ACTIVITY BRIEF

Cross-Border Cooperation and Reconciliation (CBCR)

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Regional Services Center



Kosovo Minister of Local Governance Mr. Lutfi Haziri, former mayor of Gjilan/ Gnjilane, congratulates one of the painters of "Under One Sky" from Kumanovo, Macedonia.

Partners:

Catholic Relief Service

Geographic Targets:

Flashpoint border communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia

Project Duration:

2004-2006

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Development

Activity Background

Ethnic tensions continue to hinder cooperation between communities in the Balkans, with border regions being particularly vulnerable. Acting as an ice-breaker, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) promotes interethnic reconciliation and improves the responsiveness of local governments in neighboring communities by supporting their joint efforts to improve their social and economic relationships. This \$1.2 million program is funded through Department of State transfers as support for the Stability Pact for South East Europe.

Core Interventions

- Participating communities have jointly identified priority projects, including youth and media, natural resources protection, tourism promotion, and rural employment. Joint sports and cultural events are organized to quickly establish a positive environment for cross-border cooperation.
- Concrete projects are implemented by committees drawn from both sides of the border, with representation by ethnic minorities, local municipalities, NGOs, and businesses.
- CRS trains community leaders in communication and conflict resolution skills, mentoring them through the challenging process of cooperating across borders and ethnicities for the first time since the hostilities of the 90's.

Activity Results

The slow process of building trust and cooperation – a success in itself – is showing tangible results and expanding:

- Radio programs developed by youth in Croatia and Bosnia have spurred listeners to become involved.
- An extensive survey of farmers and agribusinesses in Kosovo and Macedonia has documented their problems in accessing land and markets, forming the basis for a campaign to advocate for improvements.
- A bridge between Bosnian and Serbian communities was refurbished with new lights, improving safe access and potentially markets between communities.
- River banks in Croatia and Serbia were rehabilitated, reinvigorating recreational and potential tourist sites.