

## **Albania Bridge – Progress report February 2007**

Thanks to your generous support, so far we have raised £2,235 (about 3350 euros/4350 US dollars). This is just over 15% of our target: thank you! It's a great achievement, but unfortunately we still need your help to get to the £14,000/20,000 euros to complete the job...so if you can, please donate to the project!

Everyone in the village is very excited about the new bridge, as they realise what a noticeable improvement it will bring to their lives. Isa Isufi told us,

“I am planning to increase my goat flock, as I will have the chance to use the bridge to reach the mountain for their breeding.” ,

while 10-year old schoolgirl Saide rejoices she will be able to go to school:

“I am very pleased that the bridge is going to be built. Now I won't be looking at the bus passing by, heading to the school and me not able to catch it because of this river in rainy days.” .

As for more technical details, the money raised so far has enabled the engineer and the villagers to begin work on the project. The timing of the work is very tricky as not much can be done in the harsh winter months when the heavy rains make progress all but impossible. Equally care must be taken when the snows start to melt and high waters in the river make it sometimes dangerous to work too close to its banks. Construction of the bridge foundation started in October and the foundations, as well as the four pillars needed, have been built. A workshop has also been set up to work on the iron components of the bridge. The construction of the iron frame foundation of the bridge started in November. The construction of the iron frame is underway at the workshop site. One particularly serious problem is electricity shortages: like the rest of the country, the electricity supply in Ure e Shtrenjte is scarce and unreliable. This causes delays in the work, and the purchase of a generator for the workshop might be necessary.

The community continues to be very actively involved in the construction process. They contribute with manual work and have appointed Isuf Mehaj, who is also the head of the honey cooperative, as the head of the brigade for the workforce in Ure e Shtrenjte. The Oxfam Shkodra team is also closely monitoring the work and offering assistance where necessary.

To conclude, the outlook is bright in Ure e Shtrenjte, and the bridge is seeing the light thanks to your support and your donations. Our friends there sent us this brief but meaningful snapshot of village life:

In the upper village quarter a baby came to life last December. Now the parents are calmer because they will be able to reach the nurse and the health centre in the village only in 10 minutes, or get the minibus to Shkoder for 45 minutes instead of walking for 2 hours over the mountain to reach the hospital in Shkoder.

Thank you for helping us make things happen!

With thanks to Manuela Mece and the rest of the Oxfam team in Albania for help in compiling this report.