



SUCCESS STORY

New Roads Connect Diverse Communities in Kosovo

Villages gain better access to schools, hospitals, work and each other



Photo by Advancing Kosovo Together

New kilometer-long road in Dragolec/Dragoljevack in the municipality of Istog/Istok connects divided communities

“The road has improved relations with our Albanian neighbors because it passes out only through our [Serb] neighborhood, but also through that of the Kosovo Albanian, Bosnian, and Roma community.

June 2016 - For the first time in 20 years, a road running through Kosovo’s northwestern village of Banjskë/Banjska has been repaired, enabling the village’s community of Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs to come closer together.

Banjskë/Banjska, a village of 900 residents, is one of 67 villages in the municipality of Vushtrri/Vučitrn. For 20 years, the poor state of its road made it difficult for residents to move around. During the rainy season and the winter months, students and travelers from Banjskë/Banjska struggled to get to school and to work. To make matters worse, the river along this road was constantly flooding the farmland, making it inaccessible for weeks, and also damaging crops.

In the spring of 2015, during a USAID Advancing Kosovo Together (AKT) program meeting in Banjskë/Banjska, village residents expressed their wish for a better road. In October, the program, together with the municipality of Vushtrri/Vučitrn completed rehabilitation of the village’s road and its storm water outlets. The municipality committed to funding 20 percent of the project’s implementation costs and also to its future maintenance.

The reaction has been overwhelmingly positive. Dojčin Dančetović, who actively participated in the construction work, says that before the road’s rehabilitation, 90 percent of the road was destroyed: “During the rainy season and winter, we could barely walk down the road, and it was impossible to drive a car. The conditions were really horrible,” he says. “Now, the 370-meter long road, together with two bridges and a supporting wall, are rehabilitated. My neighbors are happy.”

Dančetović also points out that for many elderly members of his community who need constant medical care, life is much easier now. A 74-year-old resident, Desanka Dančetović, who lives alone, says that with the new road the hospital is far more accessible to her: “I am very happy! There will be no more floods.”

Hasan Gani, owner of the tractor repair shop in Vushtri/Vučitrn, says rural roads are vital for development in Kosovo, because better roads open up commercial opportunities that make farming a more profitable livelihood. “The importance of this project for us is beyond words,” says Gani. “This road is also crucial for connecting both Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb communities, because it brings our houses closer. Many families moved out of the village due to the bad living conditions. But this new road will make our life easier.”

Similarly, in March 2016, a kilometer-long gravel road was asphalted in Istog/Istok municipality, which immediately boosted the social life and

economic connectivity of 122 residents of Dragolec/Dragoljevac and almost 400 residents living in neighboring villages.

“Rehabilitation of the village road means a lot to our community, especially to returnees. It has improved our everyday life. There is no more mud and potholes, and our children arrive at school without mud stains and wearing dry shoes,” explains Dalibor Sedlarević, a resident from Dragolec/Dragoljevac. “The road has also improved the overall traffic security and relations with our Albanian neighbors, because it passes not only through our [Serb] neighborhood, but also through that of the Kosovo Albanian, Bosnian, and Roma community.”

The municipality had covered the local road with gravel on several occasions, but a lack of funds had prevented them from laying asphalt. Now, USAID’s investment has enabled the local government to stretch their funds further, for a much better and more lasting result that will benefit and link these communities for years to come.

The Advancing Kosovo Together program, which runs from 2014 to 2017, is designed to bring majority and minority groups together to increase the region’s security and stability.