

Arup and Bechtel partner with Rwandan community to build a bridge to safety

A team from Arup and Bechtel joined Bridges to Prosperity and members of the local community to build a 64-metre pedestrian footbridge in Nyaruguru, South Rwanda.

The Uwimpfizi footbridge over the river Basubira is the largest suspended footbridge Bridges to Prosperity has delivered to date. The crossing will make it safer for thousands of people from surrounding communities to travel to work, local markets and to access healthcare facilities. Over 600 school students cross the river each day to reach school.

Before the new bridge the only crossing was a makeshift timber bridge which was unusable for three months of the year. In the last two years alone, two people died and six were injured trying to cross the river.

The team of engineers, five from Arup and five from Bechtel, travelled to Rwanda for two weeks in August to build the bridge. Arup and Bechtel Group Foundation contributed £45,000 to the cost of materials and labour, while the team undertook their own fundraising to contribute an additional £7,000 to the effort.

The project team supported members of the local community to gain skills to undertake ongoing maintenance using local materials. These community members have formed a bridge maintenance committee tasked with surveying and repairing the bridge to ensure it will last for years to come.

Richard Hyson, Arup Engineer: “It was an inspiring experience to go to such a remote area and be able to work alongside the local community members to construct something that will have such a big impact on their day-to-day lives. The experience epitomised the reason I became an engineer.”

Nick Amso, graduate engineer, Bechtel: “It was incredible to draw on the skills from my day job and to work with the Rwandan team to bring much-needed infrastructure to the community. Seeing the immediate difference the bridge made to the people in the area was a truly humbling experience that will stay with me for a long time.”

The partnership between Arup, Bechtel and Bridges to Prosperity is currently in its sixth year. Bridges to Prosperity provides isolated communities with access to essential health care, education and economic opportunities by building footbridges over impassable rivers.