



Community Partners

Program

Engineers Without Borders-USA

Location

Guatemala

CH2M HILL has partnered with Engineers Without Borders-USA (EWB-USA) since 2003. The organizations share a commitment to supporting service learning opportunities for engineering students and professionals through the implementation of sustainable engineering and construction projects in developing communities around the globe.

Bridge rehabilitation in Guatemala with Engineers Without Borders-USA

Since 1998 Engineers Without Borders (EWB-USA) has been working on bridge construction in Guatemala. In January 2006 Guatemala's most impoverished state, the Department of Quiché, asked the professional Wisconsin EWB-USA chapter to replace three bridges crossing a stream in the Joybaj area that were damaged by Hurricane Stan in October 2005. A team of professionals led by CH2M HILL's Michael Paddock, a long-time EWB-USA participant, decided to tackle the challenge. They set out immediately to survey the area and provide temporary solutions.

To some, this project could seem quite daunting. In the Joybaj region only a handful of people speak Spanish, because the native language is a unique Mayan dialect. Also, no aid would come from the Guatemalan Government or from EWB-USA's local NGO partner. Demonstrating his team's tenacity, Paddock merely shrugged at these challenges and said that they never amounted to a substantial obstacle.

EWB-USA was deeply committed to the project for the simple reason that the community desperately needs help. Over half of the area's children suffer from malnutrition, and almost all the children experience "stunting" due to a serious lack of fruits and vegetables. Nearly all the children also suffer from diarrhea annually, and the infant mortality rate is around 10%. The destruction of the three bridges after the hurricane left the community completely isolated. Education suddenly screeched to a halt because teachers could no longer get to the schools, and medical assistance became a complete impossibility.

In order to complete this crucial project, the local community teamed up with EWB-USA to provide stones for building material, the local school as a surrogate motel, meals for volunteers and all the unskilled labor. The Municipality of Joybaj also pitched in by providing the transportation of materials, hand tools, the use of a backhoe and two skilled masons.

All three bridges were completed in April 2007. Over 950 hours were donated, and CH2M HILL played a key role by contributing \$5,000 for cement and other minor items, as well as support for employees willing to undertake such challenges. The project was "completely satisfying and successful" Paddock reported. He explained that one reason everything went so well was because of the immense community support; everyone worked hard and patiently overcame the uncommonly high language barrier.

The EWB-USA team walked away from this project with a feeling of accomplishment. They managed to give back to a third-world community and see immediate impact. It was also a great networking opportunity, Paddock added, "because there's nothing like sleeping out in the boondocks to build a level of confidence and camaraderie with clients and potential teaming partners."