

The rollout of Rwanda's National Urbanization Policy (NUP) opened a new chapter for Rubavu District in the country's northwest. As one of six secondary cities selected under the Rwanda Urban Development Project (RUDP) launched in 2015, Rubavu has since attracted focused investment in infrastructure and urban development.

Today, the district is witnessing a surge in modern construction projects, creating jobs, boosting investment in the industrial zone, and introducing new standards for safety and accessibility.

For engineers like Daniel Emmanuel Rugaba, the changes are both professional and personal. Rugaba is currently the site engineer in the construction sector in Rubavu, overseeing a new three-story structure in the district.

"This is my sixth contract as a site engineer since graduating," Rugaba said. "Recognition of Rubavu district as a secondary city has created more opportunities. In the next five year, the district will provide services and amenities to people who travel there."

Rugaba's team of fifteen, including six women he said have received specialized training and hands-on experience with modern building technologies. "This has created jobs in the construction and urbanization.

Since the launch of RUDP, construction in Rubavu district has been closely monitored by rigorous Rwanda Housing Authority (RHA) regulations to ensure compliance with national standards.

In May 2021, Rubavu which is located in the Kivu rift region was hit by a series of earthquakes, starting around May 23 and continuing for several days. These were triggered by the eruption of the Mount Nyiragongo volcano in the neighbouring DRC.



These tremors caused major cracks in roads, residential and commercial buildings, and schools, displacing many residents. "Because the district is prone to earthquakes, safety is a top priority. 'The construction designs have to consider earthquakes,' Rugaba explained.

'We follow a 2.5 magnitude standard and reinforce foundations with durable, high-

resistance metal.' Steel is carefully selected for strength, while columns, beams, slabs, and walls are engineered to distribute seismic forces safely, ensuring buildings can withstand the region's volcanic and seismic activity."

Rubavu's location within the volcanic zone of the Virunga Mountains makes adherence to safety standards critical. Jean Ngirabakunzi, an urban and physical planning specialist, says Rubavu is setting a benchmark for secondary cities nationwide.

The Vice Mayor of Rubavu District said that, "Our focus is on building a district that is safe, inclusive, and economically vibrant. "Through careful planning, adherence to building standards, and investment in infrastructure, we are creating opportunities for residents while ensuring that development meets the highest safety and accessibility standards."

Additionally, the Vice Mayor pointed out that Rubavu's development is aligned with Rwanda's Vision 2050 and the National Strategy for Transformation (NST 2).

"By investing in modern infrastructure, creating jobs, and ensuring safe, sustainable construction, we are turning policy into tangible progress for our residents. Our goal is a district where economic growth, urban planning, and social wellbeing advance hand in hand, "he added.

Jean Claude Nzitukuze, Infrastructure Director at the One Stop Center in Rubavu, notes that the district is striving to provide services and facilities comparable to those in Kigali. Under RUDP Phase III, new asphalt roads with street lighting and drainage systems are being constructed in residential areas. Locally adapted stone roads showcase sustainable, context-specific urban planning.

"We are already seeing social and economic impacts," Nzitukuze said. "Job creation, for both skilled and unskilled workers, has strengthened local livelihoods."

While construction is booming, challenges remain. Construction materials are expensive, and advanced machinery is often imported. "Concrete mixing and moving it to upper floors is mostly manual, which slows progress during construction," Rugaba said. "Government support could speed up construction and reduce risks."

Cross-border dynamics with Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, add complexity.

Since the M23 rebels took over the territories of Goma and Bukavu, reports from the international community have accused Rwanda of supporting the rebels, but have denied the allegations.

On the other hand, investments in Rubavu have attracted residents from across the border, creating market opportunities while increasing pressure on local services.

For Rugaba, the district's transformation signals long-term change. "Development here benefits residents, businesses, and future generations alike. In five years, Rubavu will have everything people need. Life here will be more convenient, flexible, and prosperous."

With strict standards, sustainable practices, and innovative planning, Rubavu's construction boom is reshaping the district's urban landscape while driving economic and social growth.