

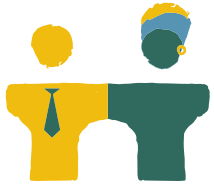


Annual Report 2023



**Bridges to
Development**

**Advancing resilient communities on a path
towards sustainable development**



In late 2023, Bridges celebrated its fifth anniversary. This was a time to both reflect on the years and celebrate how far we have come since launching in 2018.

We took this opportunity to define a new, even more ambitious strategy for the next five years (2024 -2028), to advance our mission to support resilient communities on a path to sustainable development. We are proud of our collaborations and projects over the last five years and are excited to see what the future holds.

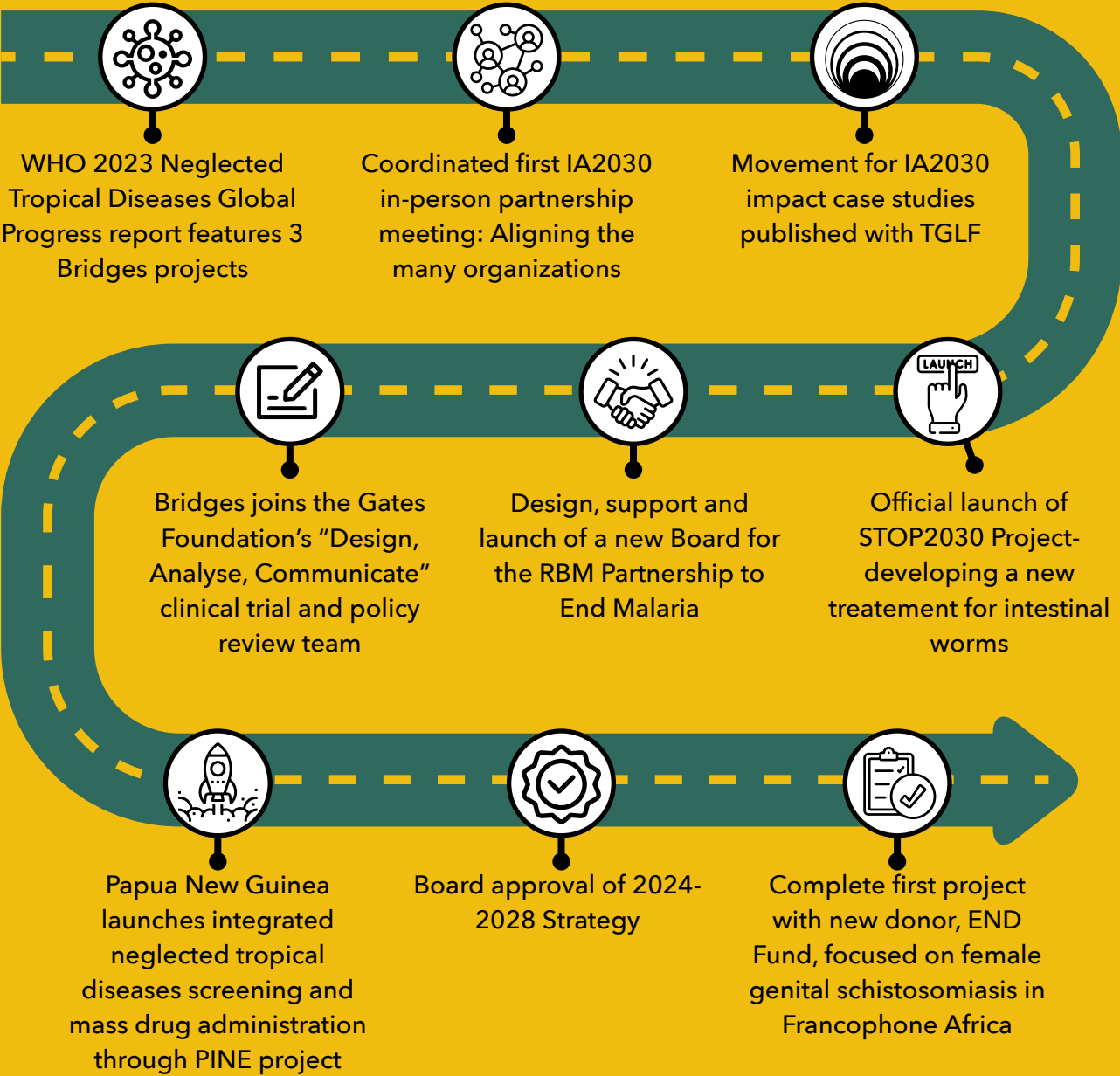
Over these short years, we have built a strong team within and around Bridges, from Board members, to graduate interns, to project-specific team members, as well as the diverse set of organizations with whom we have partnered. These collaborations enable us to have an outsized impact with a relatively small team. We have created strong organizational structures and systems, supporting the work we do and giving our partners and funders confidence in the way we operate.

In this annual report, we summarize some key 2023 organizational and programmatic highlights, delving a bit deeper into six areas of Bridges’ work.



Mother and daughter in Sanma Province, Vanuatu, who received treatment and screening for neglected tropical diseases through the PINE project.

Some highlights from our 2023 journey



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Resilient communities on a path towards sustainable development

Purpose

Harness our collective expertise in global health and development to shape dynamic partnerships, bring innovative solutions to scale, and cultivate champions to foster change

Goals

Strengthen partnerships to collaboratively deliver impact

Enabling Strategies

3x3x3

Aspirational Goal: Secure resources to pursue even bigger ideas for even faster global change

Our Organisation

- Sustain a dynamic and creative team of dedicated experts
- Commit to learning and continuous improvement
- Honour diversity in thought and talents
- Invest in the next generation
- Be courageous and collaborative

Our Work

- Advancing solutions impacting thousands, millions or billions of people
- Require increased commitment
- Nurture current and generate new partners
- Constructively challenge assumptions

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The survey team from Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research heading to study site in West New Britain Province.

Organizational Highlights 2023

Developing our 2024-2028 strategy: The Bridges team took the opportunity of our annual retreat in July to review the ways in which our 2021-2023 strategy (Annex 1) informs our work and how we might better reflect this in the next strategy. Following an iterative process with the Board, the new five-year strategy was approved in December 2023. The three goals below will serve as pillars for our work to achieve our vision of “resilient communities on a path towards sustainable development.”

Bridges Strategy 2024 - 2028

 <p>Vision</p>	<p>Resilient communities on a path towards sustainable development</p>		
 <p>Purpose</p>	<p>Harness our collective expertise in global health and development to shape dynamic partnerships; bring innovative solutions to scale; and cultivate champions to foster change</p>		
 <p>Goals</p>	<p>Strengthen partnerships to collaboratively deliver impact</p>	<p>Simplify and accelerate the pathways from innovation to impact</p>	<p>Diversify the voices tackling complex problems locally and globally</p>
	<p><i>Aspirational Goal:</i> Secure resources to pursue even bigger ideas for even faster global change</p>		
 <p>Enabling Strategies</p>	<p>Our Organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain a dynamic and creative team of dedicated experts • Commit to learning and continuous improvement • Honour diversity in thought and talents • Invest in the next generation • Be courageous and collaborative 		<p>Our Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancing solutions impacting thousands, millions or billions of people • Inspire increased commitments • Nurture current and generate new partners • Constructively challenge assumptions

Exploring opportunities for impact in Climate and Health

In 2023, Bridges began exploring how the team's unique experience and expertise, during the formative years of initiatives at the Gates Foundation, GAVI, and the Global Fund, and across development sectors, could contribute to addressing the intersection of climate change and health. Bridges partnered with The Geneva Learning Foundation (TGLF) to explore the impacts of climate change on health through the [experiences of over 1000 health care workers \(HCWs\) in low- and middle-income countries \(LMICs\)](#) and [released an opinion piece](#) challenging those us working at the global level to critically evaluate and challenge our biases and assumptions as we seek to understand and mitigate the impact of climate change on health. TGLF built on the collaborations and convened an [event for frontline health workers in the lead up to COP28](#). We anticipate continuing to build on the unique role of health care workers in the response to climate related events, building resilience, and advocating for mitigation.

New Board Members: In 2023, we welcomed two new members to the Bridges Board Members to oversee and support the work of the organization. Dirk Engels joined us as Vice-Chair of the Swiss Board and Member of the US Board, along with Zabeen Moser-Mawji as Board Member of the Swiss and US Boards. During 2023, the Board was instrumental in the development of the Bridges' strategy for 2024-2028, a Risk Management Policy and Register, and organizational Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

New Team Members: This year, we were also joined by two new collaborators with significant leadership and expertise in LMIC public health research and programs, neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and female genital schistosomiasis (FGS), Maggie Baker from Georgetown University and Caroline Pensotti. Our internship program is thriving, with unprecedented numbers of graduate students applicants from all over the globe. In 2023, we were joined by Cynthia Umunnakwe, a PhD student in Parasitology at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta in Nigeria, and Miriam Tregilgas, an MSc Global Health student at the Université de Genève in Switzerland, who both made significant contributions to our work and to the team.



Project Highlights 2023

Launching a coalition to develop the first new treatment for intestinal worms in decades: STOP2030 Consortium

Soil-transmitted helminth (STH) infections (or intestinal worms) harm children and adults in the world’s most neglected communities. STH significantly impacts the well-being and development of affected individuals, contributing to decreased learning and education outcomes, and loss of productivity. WHO estimates that at least 1.5 billion people globally are infected by one or more of the five intestinal worm species. Bridges is part of a consortium developing the first, more effective, and efficient treatment for STH in over 35 years.

STH is controlled through periodic treatment of the most at-risk groups, children and women of reproductive age. The most commonly used medicines (albendazole or mebendazole) are valuable global health tools for reducing STH infections but have low or no efficacy against two of the five worm species. However, all five worm species can be effectively treated with a combination of ivermectin and albendazole, a fixed dose combination (FDC) in a single pill. This approach addresses several issues improving treatment for *Trichuris trichiura*, treating *Strongyloides stercoralis*, maintaining a single pill formulation, treating with 2 drugs to decrease the risk of resistance, and providing a pediatric friendly formulation.

In July 2023, Bridges and six partners launched the STOP2030 Consortium to develop and launch the FDC. The project is supported by the Global Health EDCTP3 Joint Undertaking, funded by the European Union’s Horizon and Innovation programme, and Switzerland’s State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation. The project will expand the data on safety, effectiveness, acceptability, and cost-effectiveness in school-based deworming programmes. It will also ensure review by at least three regulatory agencies (Europe, Ghana and Kenya) and WHO for Prequalification. These are on track to allow FDC to be available for large-scale public health use from 2025.


Bridges leads activities on the use of such data to inform country, and stakeholder decision-making, policy, and access to the FDC (e.g., supply, demand, costing, and financing). In 2023, Bridges helped establish the legal agreements and operations of the consortium, and supported early planning for clinical trials in Ghana and Kenya.

STOP2030 project in numbers

 **5**
Countries

 **7**
Partners

 **3**
Years

 **Funding**

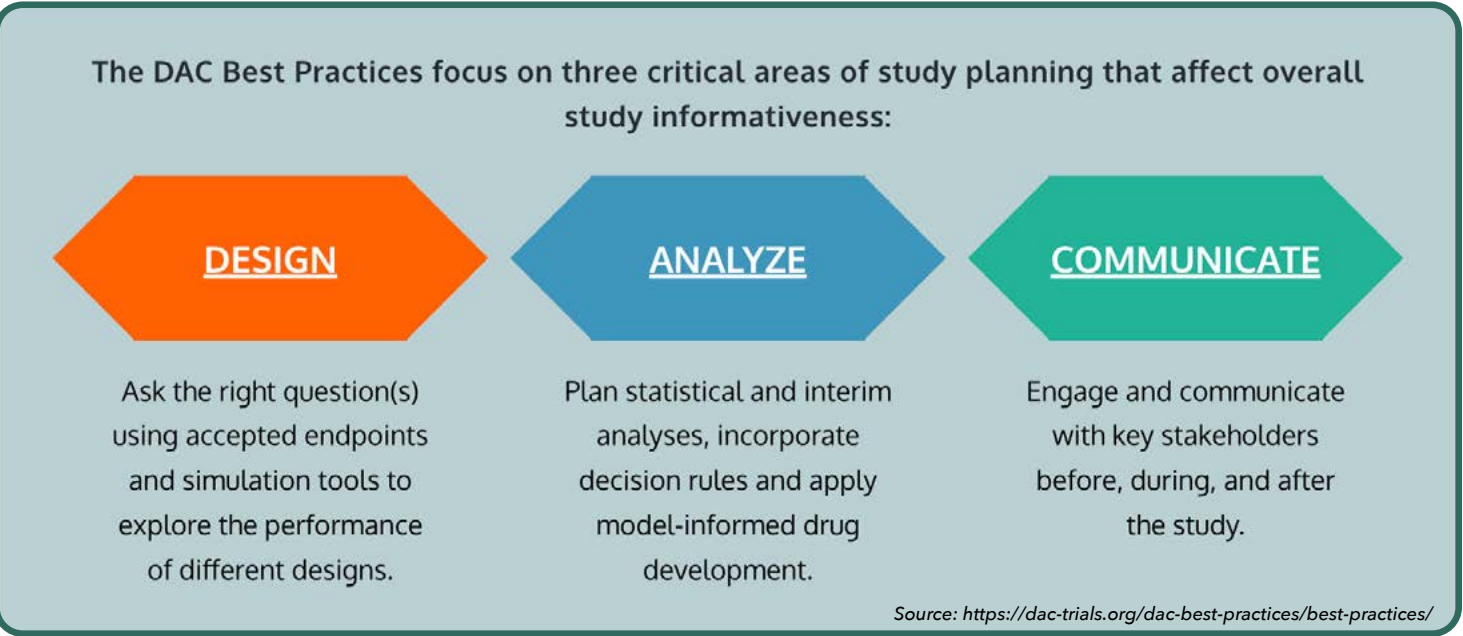
3.5 Million €
In funding by the EDCTP/EU

797 Thousand €
In funding by the Swiss Government

Ensuring valuable return on global health research investments

There is growing recognition in scientific and grant-making communities that a [large number of clinical trials](#) fail to address their intended questions (informativeness) and therefore are less valuable to inform subsequent investments. This is a waste of scarce resources, time, and risks betraying the trust of trial participants while delaying benefits to the intended recipients. The “Design, Analyze, Communicate” ([DAC](#)) team was created by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to help grantees optimize studies for informativeness and impact.

DAC brings together multi-disciplinary teams to provide an integrated review of trial protocols and research targeting policy change. Alan and Julie were recruited to join DAC reviews in 2023 based on their expertise and experience that spans the continuum from clinical trials to global and local policy change and intervention adoption. Over six months, Bridges contributed to strengthening ten protocols or policy plans, across diverse topics such as food fortification, digital health information systems, medicine and vaccine development, HIV testing and more. Bridges’ engagement with DAC facilitates cross-expertise learning and knowledge sharing, accelerating the pathway from innovation to global health impact.



Strengthening a global partnership for Immunization Agenda 2030

Bridges continues to play a crucial role in advancing [Immunization Agenda 2030](#) (IA2030), the global strategy for the decade aimed at ensuring everyone, everywhere, at every age, benefits from vaccines for good health and well-being. Since January 2020, a small team from Bridges has served as the Secretariat (hosted by WHO), coordinating IA2030's global and regional partners around shared priorities and targets.

In early 2023, Bridges organized the first in-person meeting for IA2030 partners since the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting resulted in clearer roles and responsibilities, strengthened partnership engagement, and fostered ownership, accountability, and collective action. The Bridges Secretariat team has advanced the initiatives called for, including a more decentralized IA2030 operational model, stronger regional platforms, and a streamlined Working Group structure to facilitate country-level action. The retreat contributed to the launch of the [Big Catch-Up](#), a joint initiative by global partners to address the significant decline in global immunization coverage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. To support this initiative, the Gavi Board announced in December 2023 that US\$290 million would be available to fund catch-up, restoration, and strengthening activities in eligible countries.

Other Bridges activities in 2023 included the development of the [2022 Technical Progress Report](#) to the global immunization advisory body, the WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE), as well as having a central role behind the development vision and process of the regional strategy with the 39 countries and territories of the Americas, and continued support for the rollout of National Immunization Strategies for country planning and implementation of IA2030.



IA2030 Partners' Meeting February 2023 group photo



Sarah, Alan and Edda with Alba Maria, WHO

Examples of case studies



In 2023, with resources provided by the Wellcome Trust, Bridges also continued its partnership with The Geneva Learning Foundation (TGLF), supporting the "Movement for Immunization Agenda IA2030." This initiative encourages immunization practitioners to support each other in extending immunization reach locally and achieving global IA2030 goals. By the end of 2023, the Movement had grown to over 16,300 members from 99 countries, largely in low- and middle-income countries, working at subnational levels, and affiliated with Ministries of Health. Activities in 2023 included "Teach to Reach: Connect" events, supported by Gavi, UNICEF, and other partners. These events allowed immunization practitioners to share experiences on promoting confidence in the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, reaching zero-dose children in urban areas, and vaccinating in humanitarian settings. [Several case studies were released](#), demonstrating how participating in a peer learning program and connecting with colleagues worldwide have helped practitioners achieve significant, local immunization gains. Examples from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and other countries illustrate how local practitioners can exchange practical ideas to improve program performance.

Addressing Female Genital Schistosomiasis (FGS)

Female Genital Schistosomiasis (FGS) is a complication of schistosomiasis infection affecting an estimated 56 million women and girls across sub-Saharan Africa who do not have access to safe water or proper sanitation. Due to a lack of awareness amongst health workers, FGS is underdiagnosed with serious implications for women's sexual and reproductive health (SRH), including infertility, an increased risk of HIV and HPV infection, stigma, and social isolation. Despite its prevalence, FGS remains misunderstood, under-researched, and under-reported.

Bridges continues to look for opportunities to increase awareness and address this disease, as demonstrated by the projects below.

Francophone Female Genital Schistosomiasis Training Course

The 2-phase workshop spanned seven months, learning Phase 1 focused on core competencies for FGS management, integrating FGS into health programs, and fostering community engagement. A total of 255 health professionals completed this phase, each creating a tailored action plan for FGS in their work setting. Learning Phase 2, the Impact Accelerator, supported and motivated 97 health professionals from Phase 1 to implement their action plans.

An in-depth data analysis revealed several key insights:

- Participants' capacity for FGS management and professional development has been strengthened across a diverse set of health care workers, nurses, midwives, doctors and specialists all learning together.
- Regardless of limited online access participants were able to successfully complete the course and take action in their workplace and communities.
- Significant impact was made by participants in raising FGS awareness and training colleagues- by the end of the course over 49,000 were reached through awareness campaigns and over 2,600 colleagues were trained.
- Developed as part of the FGS Accelerated Scale Together (FAST) Package



George (nurse) and Austin (Laboratory Clinical Officer) at Miniambo Health Centre, Homa Bay County, were recognized for their dedication to raising the profile of FGS in their communities



Head nurse Karen, and her team, are working hard to integrate FGS screening and diagnosis into cancer screening services at Homa Bay Hospital.

Creating a Minimum Service Package for Female Genital Schistosomiasis

In 2023, Bridges began working in close collaboration with the Kenyan non-governmental organization LVCT Health and Frontline AIDS on a groundbreaking pilot study across three high schistosomiasis-burden counties in Kenya. Funded by the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), the effort aims to improve women's health and well-being by mainstreaming FGS control by integrating prevention, screening, diagnosis, and treatment seamlessly into sexual and reproductive health services.

The project team, in collaboration with global experts, developed a first-of-its-kind Minimum Service Package for FGS integration. The Package is a comprehensive approach covering health literacy, screening and diagnosis, treatment and care, and social inclusion and equity. It goes beyond treating the disease to providing a holistic approach to address all aspects of the impact of FGS.

The results are encouraging. Over 80 health workers and over 100 community health promoters received intensive training in the Minimum Service Package in the three counties. Building on their new knowledge and personal passion, they are sharing their expertise with colleagues - raising the profile of a comprehensive approach to addressing the many impacts of FGS on women, families and communities. Data collection is ongoing as more and more women are being referred for diagnosis and treatment, forming a growing network of FGS ambassadors who are raising awareness in their own communities.

Female Genital Schistosomiasis Integration Group (FIG)

In 2021, Bridges co-founded the FGS Integration Group (FIG) with Frontline AIDS to bring together an integrated, cross-disciplinary initiative on FGS. FIG includes organizations working on HIV, cervical cancer, women's health, sexually transmitted infections, and Water and Sanitation (WASH). Bridges continued to lead the growing coalition from our role as Co-Chair through 2023. [Highlights for 2023](#) include supporting countries to integrate FGS into Global Fund proposals; the recognition of FIG as contributing towards schistosomiasis elimination in the [2023 WHO NTD Progress Report](#); the publication of [a policy paper](#) and [a scoping review](#); and [providing evidence](#) to inform the inclusion of FGS in the UK Government's approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) aid programs. Bridges also represented FIG at a variety of networking and advocacy events in 2023, including Women Deliver and the American Society for Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (ASTMH) Annual Meeting. We supported the establishment of a new governance system for FIG, including a new Steering Group and preparations for the election of new Co-Chairs in 2024.



Julie with Rukaya Mumoni at the Women Deliver conference. Rukaya was honored as a "Heroine Of Health" for her dedication to the health of her community as an immunization professional and committed advocate fighting FGS.

Tackling NTDs in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu

2023 marked the third year of the Bridges’ led Pacific Integrated NTD Elimination Project (PINE). Partners include the WHO, the Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Vanuatu Ministries of Health (MOH), the PNG Institute of Medical Research, Kirby Institute and Case Western University. This initiative is supported by the [Takeda Pharmaceuticals LTD Corporate Social Responsibility Program](#). The COVID-19 pandemic and multiple catastrophic climate events delayed the implementation of the PINE project, requiring in a no-cost extension that will ensure communities receive the promised healthcare interventions. Project activities are anticipated to complete by the end of 2024.

The PINE project aims to control or eliminate a group of NTDs, including [soil transmitted helminths \(STH\)](#), [yaws](#), [lymphatic filariasis \(LF\)](#), [scabies](#), and [leprosy](#), through innovative integrated community-wide campaigns (mass drug administration or MDA), skin screening and referrals, sero-prevalence surveys, and health system strengthening in Vanuatu and a province of PNG. The project supports the WHO integrated MDA policy and improves alignment with national health systems reporting and medication supply. Integrated skin disease training has resulted in increased confidence among health workers in diagnosing and treating skin diseases, leading to more sustainable interventions. Our focus on integration enables countries to maximize limited resources available to address multiple NTDs. The project works with Ministry of Health teams at national and local levels to build on the progress made to date, acknowledging the limited resources and challenges throughout the health system in both countries.



Project outcomes:	Papua New Guinea	Vanuatu
Collection of data on disease prevalence using integrated seroprevalence surveys		
Integrated MDA and skin disease screening	First ever in West New Britain Province	2 years in Tafea and Sanma provinces, 1 year in Shefa
People reached in 2023	Over 200,000	68,982
People reached overall	Report pending	141,611



Transitioning the governance of the RBM Partnership to End Malaria

2023 was a pivotal year for the RBM Partnership to End Malaria as it transformed to better respond to the mounting challenges caused by malaria and meet the needs of those most affected by the disease. The process of transforming its governance model, which started in 2022, was central to this. Bridges played a significant role in the design and transition to this new model.

In 2022, Bridges coordinated a consultative process leading to the redesign of the RBM Partnership's governance to give greater voice to the countries most affected by this disease. In 2023, our work focused on supporting a smooth transition to a new, more representative Board. This included ensuring an effective handover from the outgoing to new Board as well as formalization of the new Board constituency support structures and nomination processes to identify new Board members.

The new 23-member Board term was successfully initiated in May 2023 through a retreat managed by Bridges and followed by an inaugural Board meeting. During this time, we also supported the onboarding of the incoming CEO, Dr. Michael Charles, who officially started his role in July 2023. In Q4 of 2023, Bridges helped develop a plan to outline priorities for the remaining 2024-2025 years of the current partnership strategy and to recommit to its implementation.

In addition to Board reform, Bridges' strategic advisory support extended to other parts of the RBM Partnership, updating operational policies with improved ways of working related to the various operational arms of the Partnership.

After the RBM Board meeting in Dubai in November 2023, Bridges was called to support numerous initiatives in 2024 as the RBM Partnership rebuilds capacities to tackle challenges until 2030.



Financials

Established in 2018, Bridges to Development operates in Switzerland as a not-for-profit Swiss Association, and in the United States as a Section 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. As a not-for-profit Swiss Association, Bridges is exempt from Swiss cantonal and federal taxes, and the US entity is also an exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code.

Funding for Bridges in 2023 was received from diverse international organizations, foundations, individuals, and corporations in Europe, the US, and Asia. Audited financial statements are available on request from finance@bridgestodevelopment.org. Bridges' financial statements underwent a voluntary audit in Switzerland by Gestoval Société Fiduciaire SA according to Swiss Auditing Standards and a full audit in the US by Aiken & Sanders, Inc., PS. according to Generally Accepted Auditing Standards (GAAS).



Acknowledgements

The Bridges team continues to be ever grateful to our families, who support and encourage our commitment to the work of Bridges. The resilience of the communities we work with inspires us, especially the women and children whose health and livelihoods suffer disproportionately from health threats, development challenges, and climate change.

We thank Anastasia Pantelias and Isis Umbelino-Walker for their dedication and contributions as they both moved on to other adventures beyond Bridges in 2023. We are grateful to our 2023 interns, Miriam and Cynthia, for the passion and dedication brought to their work. We also thank Bridge’s Board members, past and present, for their hands-on support and enthusiasm in helping shape and strengthen the work of the organization.

We appreciate the unique, ongoing support from the [Cyberpeace Institute](#), which has helped us establish resilient systems and processes. This relationship has meant that we could collaborate effectively online, safeguard files and financial systems from phishing and cyber-attacks and especially keep data secure regarding the people we reach with our projects and donors that support our work.



Alan Brooks
Managing Partner and Co-founder; Switzerland



Isis Umbelino,
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Julie Jacobson
Managing Partner and Co-founder; US



Miriam Tregilgas,
Intern, Université de Genève; Switzerland



Sarah Churchill
Partner and Co-founder; Switzerland



Cynthia Umunnakwe,
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Caroline Pensotti
Eelco Szabo
Nicole Vecchio

Annex 1: Bridges’ Strategy (2021 - 2023)

Our Purpose

Advance economic and social well-being by supporting opportunities for communities to overcome health and education barriers

towards our Vision

Resilient communities on a path towards sustainable development

through these Goals

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Champion and deliver on innovative international development ideas | 2. Advance novel solutions to global health and development needs of marginalized communities | 3. Scale-up transformative technologies |
|---|---|---|

Aspirational Goal: Launch a fund to independently pursue big ideas for global change

building upon Enabling Strategies

- Inspire increased commitments
- Bring in new partners
- Strengthen partnerships to achieve ambitious goals that meet the needs of marginalized communities

and our Organizational Approach

- Obtain diverse and reliable funding to sustain a dynamic and creative team of dedicated experts
- Commit to learning, improvement, and continuous growth
- Honour diversity in thought and talents
- Invest in the next generation
- Be courageous and collaborative

