



# Bridges to Development

Advancing resilient communities on a path towards sustainable development

## Annual Report 2021

This report reviews the activities and achievements of Bridges to Development (Bridges) over its third full year of operations including project highlights, key learnings, organizational development, and year-end financials.

### Highlights from 2021

- **Bridges continued to serve as the Secretariat for the Immunization Agenda 2030 (IA2030)**, coordinating a new partnership to advance an ambitious global strategy for this new decade. With the global pandemic as a backdrop during its first year of implementation, Bridges supported partners at global, regional, and country levels in the push to address inequities and deliver the benefits of life-saving vaccines to populations around the globe.
- **In collaboration with our partner, The Geneva Learning Foundation (TGLF), Bridges further explored the impact of peer-to-peer learning**, supporting or leading virtual learning programs in immunization and female genital schistosomiasis. These helped empower more than 3,000 health professionals across more than 70 countries to identify challenges in their work areas to address, then support each other virtually to make change happen and improve delivery of health services to their communities.
- Although significantly affected by COVID-related delays, **the Pacific Integrated NTD Elimination (PINE) project successfully conducted the first integrated mass drug administration (MDA) campaign in Tafea Province, Vanuatu**. The campaign took place in November and December 2021 and reached over 26,000 people.
- With the active leadership of the Ghana Ministry of Health, Bridges and our partner, GLIDE, **Bridges hosted an impactful malaria and NTD integration workshop which facilitated a shift in how the two programs work together and reach the communities that they serve**.
- Although COVID has disrupted education worldwide, **Bridges scaled up a “twinning” between schools in a rural community of Ecuador and a stronger “resource” school in Quito**. Students (most of whom are female) from four schools worked together during **virtual weekly courses in robotics**, building skills in engineering, coding, and English. One of the young women won a robotics competition with students in Columbia, France and Spain.
- **Although relatively small, Bridges continues to advance a diverse strategy delivering an out-sized impact**. During 2021, Bridges had more than 10 primary collaborations, a number of which are highlighted below, funded by more than 10 different public and private organizations and foundations.

# Examples of impact-driven work in 2021

## A portfolio approach to improving immunization worldwide

### **Implementation of Immunization Agenda 2030**

With funding from the United State Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Health Organization (WHO), Bridges continued to support WHO, UNICEF, other partners, and countries worldwide to move from vision to operationalization of the IA2030, the world's immunization strategy for the decade. Providing key project management and technical assistance, Bridges led development of the IA2030 Framework for Action, endorsed by the May 2021 World Health Assembly (WHA), and supported the successful setting up of and coordination across key structures of the global ownership and accountability structures. The Bridges team also assisted WHO and partners to prepare reporting and materials for the first IA2030 report to WHO's preeminent technical advisory group for immunization.

In 2021, regional and national implementation of IA2030 began in earnest. Bridges contributed to strategic and operational planning in the African region and through separate funding from WHO, coordinated the development and roll out of guidance for National Immunisation Strategies (NIS), a new strategic framework to support country planning and implementation of IA2030. Through these activities, Bridges is helping to lay the foundation for a concerted drive to close remaining gaps, to reach the most vulnerable populations with the lowest vaccination coverage and integrate immunization programmes within comprehensive and equitable primary healthcare systems.

### **Peer-to-Peer Platform Supporting Primary Health Care (PHC) and Immunization Practitioners**

Bridges has been working since 2019 with The Geneva Learning Foundation (TGLF) on peer-to-peer platforms to strengthen global health, and in particular respond to the COVID pandemic and strengthen immunization services. During 2021, the partnership received funding from the Wellcome Trust to support health professionals from over 70 low- and middle-income countries. The support expanded TGLF's learning platform, complemented by Bridges' international development expertise, to support over 3,000 health professionals (scholars). Over 80% of the TGLF scholars work delivering primary health care at sub-national levels, and over 50% are employed by Ministries of Health. Each is identifying ways to strengthen PHC and immunization services in their communities and motivate each other to share innovations and implement their action plans. This growing, intrinsically inspired "movement" is part of the wider Immunization Agenda 2030 consultative engagement, bringing health professionals, communities, and development partners like WHO and UNICEF together to achieve global immunization goals.

One cohort of 551 scholars (Figure 1) reflected the diversity of participants engaging with their peers in this digital platform.



## A portfolio approach to addressing female genital schistosomiasis (FGS)

### **Female Genital Schistosomiasis Scholar Workshop**

The workshop on FGS was part of the FGS Accelerating Scale Together (FAST) Package and was conducted online in English and French in a series of sessions over a two-week period. Led by Bridges in partnership with The Geneva Learning Foundation (TGLF), more than 300 health care professionals in Sub-Saharan Africa participated from all levels of the health system. The goal was for health care providers to integrate FGS into their clinical practice by improving their ability to assess risk factors, prevent, diagnose, and manage FGS. The strategy was based on peer-to-peer learning with moderation and the guidance of subject matter experts. It used a digital learning platform provided by TGLF and encouraged learners to co-create solutions. Participants developed action plans to integrate FGS into their practice and establish and maintain a culture of awareness. Six months after the workshop, Bridges and TGLF facilitated a unique FGS Impact Accelerator to empower and support FGS scholars in implementing their action plans. The Accelerator, conducted online in English and French, included ~100 health care professionals. The Impact Accelerator built on impressive progress by the Scholars, bolstered the development and implementation of the action plans and further strengthened the network of new FGS advocates.

### **FGS Integration Group (FIG)**

In early 2021, Bridges to Development and Frontline Aids initiated a transition from traditionally marginalized approaches to tackle Female Genital Schistosomiasis (FGS), to instead integrate it comprehensively within related health policies, programs, and services. Since then, we engaged with several partners to raise FGS awareness, culminating in the emergence of a crosscutting, multisector group, the FGS Integration Group (FIG). FIG is an innovative coalition of organizations galvanizing joint action across the sectors of sexual and reproductive health and rights community, HIV, HPV/cervical cancer, neglected tropical disease and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) to tackle the neglected issue of FGS, aiming to strengthen the public health response and universal access to healthcare for women and girls.

## Integrated approach to tackling neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu

In 2020, Bridges was awarded a \$6M grant from Takeda Pharmaceuticals LTD Corporate Social Responsibility Program with the goal to control or eliminate a set of neglected tropical diseases from two countries in the South Pacific, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Vanuatu. The program is supporting both countries' governments to roll out integrated MDA for yaws, scabies, soil-transmitted helminths (both countries), and lymphatic filariasis (PNG only). The program is also piloting and assessing the feasibility of integrating screening and referrals for skin diseases such as yaws and leprosy that require follow-up by the health system. Lastly, the program aims to support capacity building in both countries through improved training and network-building across health facilities to promote peer-to-peer communication and learning. Bridges and partners concluded the first year of implementation in 2021 with the completion of the first integrated MDA campaign with skin screening and referrals in Tafea Province, Vanuatu (see pictures below).



*Administration of MDA*



*Skin exam by nurse*

## Accelerating progress towards disease elimination

Bridges has partnered with the Global Institute for Disease Elimination (GLIDE) to create an independent review and evaluation framework to assess elimination and eradication (E&E) programs. This evaluation process was based on an extensive review of disease E&E efforts that identified predictable areas of risk to a program. Based on this work, an evaluation framework was created to help identify opportunities for program strengthening and improvement. The Global Elimination and Eradication Acceleration Review (GEAR) process provides the framework and tools needed to support teams to solicit and analyze feedback from across the broad community of stakeholders involved in a disease E&E program. With the help of a disease expert group and an independent advisory group, the findings of program strengths and risks are analyzed and then discussed with the disease community to take forward any necessary strategic improvements for increased impact. From May 2021, the team created and piloted the framework with the onchocerciasis elimination program with excellent participation across a diverse set of partners. Once fully analyzed, the findings will be shared back to the onchocerciasis community in 2022 for action. The experience from this project will be documented in a case study and a GEAR guide, including all supporting materials for other disease elimination programs to use in future.

## Facilitating closer collaboration between NTD and Malaria programs

As part of Bridges' collaboration with GLIDE, the team is pursuing a novel approach to encourage and facilitate deeper coordination and collaboration between countries' NTD and malaria programs. Building on a white paper released in 2021, the team designed an 'Integration Workshop' methodology with the goal of building cross-program relationships and identifying feasible and actionable opportunities for integration. This innovative framework aims to overcome the typical roadblocks thwarting integration and support the identification of potential cross-program or cross-sector 'win-win' integration opportunities for national disease programs. During 2021, Bridges supported the Ghana Health Service's NTD and Malaria Programs in preparing for a series of events that culminated in a workshop held in November. Well received by its participants from national and sub-national staffing levels, the workshop identified nine prioritized and feasible 'win-win' opportunities for the NTD and malaria teams to pursue together. A case study documented this experience and resource tools are now available for other countries to adapt and use.

## Twin Schools project in Uganda and Ecuador

Bridges' oldest project, built around funding from a private Swiss foundation, supports communities in Uganda and Ecuador to advance the educational development of teachers and students across "resource" schools and nearby "partner" schools. In Uganda, the twinning is between two all-girls secondary schools, with the resource school helping to add sustainable curricula around occupational skills at the partner school (e.g., farming, baking, sewing, hairdressing, piggery) to the existing academic subjects. In 2021 we provided targeted support to the partner school and staff through the second year of school COVID-19 closures, the longest of any country in Africa. The project team used it as a learning moment, teaching students to make liquid soap for use in their community. As re-opening in January 2022 approached, the schools worked with families and communities to enable the best possible "re-launch" of schooling. This included specific efforts to ensure that the maximum number of students would restart education instead of leaving school for early marriage, pregnancy, or jobs. We are pleased that the enrollment immediately reached pre-Covid levels, with over 50 girls in school above the pre-project baseline.

In Ecuador, the focus is on increasing the likelihood that students attend university through twinning between 3 schools in a largely indigenous area and a resource school approximately 50 km away in Quito. In 2020, 10 teachers jointly completed university diplomas in advanced training for math and languages. They used the school closures through 2021 as the basis for developing local interventions and scaled-up training which will be implemented in their schools starting in 2022, including enhanced learning infrastructure, especially IT. In addition, the schools began virtual courses in robotics as an extracurricular activity with 25 students and teachers. This initiative equipped the students and teachers from all the schools with engineering, coding/programming, advanced mathematics, and English skills and will culminate with students building robots for a global competition in April 2022.



*Uganda – Students learning to make soap for the community preventing infectious diseases*



*Ecuador – Student-designed thumbprint scanner door lock*

## Documenting lessons from the introduction of a novel intervention for lymphatic filariasis

In an effort to document and learn from the experience of the accelerated development and introduction of the new triple-drug therapy for lymphatic filariasis and other novel innovations for neglected tropical diseases, Bridges led the creation of a supplement to the journal *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*. Along with guest editor, Dr. Eric Ottesen, Director of the NTD Support Center at the Task Force for Global Health, the Bridges team developed the concept and outline for the supplement; identified and recruited authors for each article; contributed directly to four articles; and coordinated and managed the process from conception to finalization of the supplement in close collaboration with the journal's editorial staff. Due to travel constraints from the COVID pandemic, the initially planned field visits to help with the development of articles around the early adopters could not take place and several articles needed to be re-worked. The final supplement, titled: "Accelerating Innovation to Impact: Learning from Triple-Drug Therapy (IDA) for Lymphatic Filariasis and from Other Innovations" will offer a diverse set of experiences on what it takes to accelerate delivery across drug, diagnostics, and vaccines. The supplement will be launched online and in print in 2022.

## Organizational development and learning

- Building, strengthening and managing global partnerships:** Bridges continues to play a trusted and critical role in several global partnerships including supporting the implementation of IA2030, being a founding member of public-private-academic consortium to develop an AI-based microscope which, if successful, would be the first improvement in diagnosing intestinal worms in over 50 years, and serving as an advisor to Uniting Combat NTDs. Bridges brought in new resources allowing us to lead the development of FIG, a new

global coalition on FGS. Through these engagements, Bridges is helping to shape the strategies for key global health issues, contributing to impact that far outreaches its relatively small team.

- **Deepening our engagement in peer-to-peer learning:** Bridges continues to explore the impact of peer-to-peer learning through several of our projects. Our partnership with The Geneva Learning Foundation has shown the value of this approach in reaching to the grassroots level in both immunization and FGS; creating networks and catalyzing action at the local level that, together, can contribute to solving global problems. Bridges has taken the lessons of this approach also to the PINE project; launching a communications strategy with Vanuatu Ministry of Health that aims to create a peer-to-peer network of health workers in Vanuatu to help support capacity-building within the health system.
- **Building the next generation through an internship program:** Bridges is committed to investing in the next generation of development professionals. Our experience with our interns in 2019 and 2020 was exceptional and, therefore, we continued our internship program in 2021. Our internship call received many qualified candidates, and we took on three interns: Gabi, Emmeline, and Isis. Bridges benefited greatly from their involvement in our work in 2021. In addition, we were committed to helping them build their experience-base and network to set them up for their next steps. After the internship was completed, Gabi, landed a role working on COVID-19 with the Swiss government then as a Manager and Scientific Collaborator on Sexual and Reproductive Health at The Graph Network, Emmeline returned to her Master's program, and, Bridges offered Isis a consultancy to continue her outstanding work on FGS.
- **Serving as ASTMH President:** Julie had a challenging yet successful Presidential year at ASTMH. She chose the theme of Compassion, Culture, and Courage to overcome the new and ongoing challenges of COVID, climate change, and colonialism. To explore this theme and keep the ASTMH community connected and inspired throughout the year, Julie launched a fireside chat series conducting interviews with Bill Foege (former Director of the CDC and the Task Force for Global Health), Soumya Swaminathan (WHO's first Scientific Director), and President Carter. The COVID pandemic resulted in the cancellation of the in-person ASTMH annual meeting which was then conducted virtually. The positive outcome of this was that virtual format allowed additional reach to members of LMICs that would not have been able to attend in person. She now steps into the role of immediate past President in the 3-year presidential cycle.

## Financials

Bridges to Development operates in Switzerland as a Swiss Association, established as a not-for-profit legal entity in 2018, and in the United States, established in 2018 and registered as a section 501(c)(3) 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 2021 was received from diverse international organizations, foundations, and corporations in Europe, US, Asia and the Middle East. Income and grants received in 2021 totaled USD 1,289,537 in Switzerland and USD 3,081,513 in the US with expenses totaling USD 1,103,805 in Switzerland and USD 2,487,193 in the US. The total unrestricted funds of the organization as of 31 December 2021 amounted to USD 286,547 in Switzerland and USD 337,893 in the US. The restricted funds as of the same date were USD 41,096 in Switzerland and US 3,024,541 in the US. The restricted funds in the US are comprised of a grant for the first two years of the three-year PINE project which commenced in 2021. 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 success of Bridges' third-year running is due to the oversight of dedicated Board members and valued contributions from across a broad team, including external collaborators, graduate student interns, bookkeepers, and accountants. The Bridges staff extends its thanks in particular to our families, near and far, whose love and encouragement continues to nurture our team.

**Alan Brooks**

Managing Partner and Co-founder, Switzerland

**Julie Jacobson**

Managing Partner and Co-founder, US

**Sarah Churchill**

Partner and Co-founder, Switzerland

**Anastasia Pantelias**

Associate Partner, US

**Cathy Grebert**

Finance and Operations Manager, Switzerland

**Nicole Vecchio**

Contractor, US

**Edda Magnus**

Contractor, Switzerland

**2021 Bridges Interns**

**Emmeline Rumpf**, University of Geneva, Switzerland

**Gabriela Guizzo Dri**, University of Geneva, Switzerland

**Isis Umbelino**, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Netherlands

# Strategy Overview 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