

Annual Report 2022



Health and well-being for all people and communities.











A Message from the Co-Chairs of the Board of Directors





Photo Courtesy: Eva Rathgeber

Photo Courtesy: Carol Vlassoff

Throughout the difficult years of the pandemic, HealthBridge was able to maintain a steady course, with a positive financial balance, a full staff complement, the continuation of program activities and the addition of exciting new initiatives. Like most other organizations in Canada and elsewhere, HealthBridge adjusted its way of working. For example, the Ottawa office has been reduced in size as many HealthBridge staff now live and work elsewhere, and because remote work, or a hybrid of remote and in-situ arrangements, has become the new normal.

HealthBridge's initiatives focusing on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Bangladesh and adolescent sexual and reproductive health in Nepal and Vietnam have continued to bring positive changes for young people in these communities. The partners in Nepal and Vietnam are exploring new participatory ways to deliver comprehensive sexuality education in schools, including student-led activities such as plays, quizzes and other games. In Bangladesh the SRHR project is also engaging the energy of youth by training and empowering young volunteers to raise awareness in their communities about issues salient to their wellbeing, including gender equality and access to reproductive health services.

Through its Livable Cities program, HealthBridge and its partners are committed to promoting quality public spaces, key for the health and well-being of urban communities. Playgrounds and other open public spaces provide children with opportunities for unstructured play that is important to their health and development. In Niger, HealthBridge worked with the government to supply two schools with playgrounds to demonstrate the benefits of outdoor play. These will serve as positive examples to advocate for playgrounds in all schools. In the rapidly growing Vietnamese city of Hoi An, a Public Spaces Master Plan, created in 2015 by the government in collaboration with HealthBridge, was evaluated showing an increase in total area of public spaces and improved quality of public spaces five years later. The evaluation also demonstrated that the Master Plan is an effective policy tool to increase government commitment to creating public spaces. The government has committed to revising the Master Plan and to developing a guide for local officials and communities to maintain and manage public spaces.

Food policy continued to be a focus for HealthBridge in 2022. Urban markets and urban farming are important sources of fresh, healthy and affordable food for city residents in many parts of the world. Following the success of an initial farmers market in Dhaka, Bangladesh, our partners were asked by the funder, FAO, to establish another 15 markets around the city. These markets connect producers to consumers and benefit everyone by also providing an attractive outdoor space to socialize. Urban farming is an important way to address food insecurity and improve access to affordable quality produce. Our partners in India have been supporting low-income families to engage in urban farming since before the outbreak of COVID and since the

pandemic, the government in India has also given support to urban farming as a way to address food insecurity. Urban farms not only provide families with food to supplement their diets but the surplus which is sold in the local market is an important source of additional income.

Finally, HealthBridge has continued to be active in the area of tobacco control and non-communicable disease prevention. In Vietnam, research and advocacy have resulted in moving forward policy for taxes on sugar sweetened beverages and tobacco products, as well as for package labeling for sugar sweetened beverages. Both tobacco products and sugar sweetened beverages contribute to poor health outcomes, and policies which reduce access to and the attractiveness of these products can reduce their use. Policy is key for fostering an enabling environment for making changes towards positive public health impacts.

As co-chairs, we greatly appreciate the dedication of HealthBridge staff and our fellow Board members, as well as our committed donors and partners who help HealthBridge make progress towards its mission to improve health and reduce health inequities around the world.

Eva Rathgeber and Carol Vlassoff Co-Chairs, HealthBridge Board of Directors





Livable Cities 🐠



What We Do

We improve the livability of cities for the most vulnerable by ensuring access to healthy transportation, healthy foods, parks and public spaces.

How We Work

We work with local groups in low and middleincome countries to strengthen the policies and programs needed to make cities livable.

Evaluation of the Hoi An Public Spaces Master Plan

In 2012, the HealthBridge Vietnam team began working with government officials from the city of Hoi An to help them improve their public space system. The government recognized that public spaces are essential to Hoi An's success and, as a rapidly growing city, they needed a plan to make sure they had a quality public space system that would meet the needs of local residents and visitors. The project team, made up of several government departments and HealthBridge Vietnam, consulted over 600 residents and



Kristie Daniel
Livable Cities Program Director

community groups, and in 2015 the Hoi An Public Spaces Master Plan was finalized. Through this Plan, they aimed to develop 79 new parks and improve 120 existing sites by 2020. The Plan also set a target of ensuring 100% of the residential areas in Hoi An would have a neighbourhood public space that was within a distance of 300 m, an easy distance to access by walking and bicycling.

After a delay caused by COVID-19, HealthBridge Vietnam and the project team conducted an evaluation of the Plan. The results of the evaluation showed that, by 2021, Hoi An created 50 new public spaces and improved 60 existing public spaces. This increased the total area of public spaces by 200,000 m2 and increased the amount of public space available to residents from 2.8 m2/resident to 5 m2/resident. The evaluation concluded that the Master Plan was an effective policy tool to increase government commitment to creating public spaces. The Plan increased the number of public spaces and improved the quality of the existing public spaces. As a result, more than 4,000 people use the parks each day, many of whom are seniors and children. Moving forward, the Hoi An government will revise the Public Spaces Master Plan and set new objectives and targets as well as develop a manual to guide local officials and communities to maintain and manage their public spaces.

Niger play spaces

Children's unstructured play is critical for their health and development. The U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, requires governments to recognize the rights of children to engage in play. Unfortunately, Niger has thousands of primary schools and public kindergartens that lack play areas. After several meetings with Ministry of Education officials, our local partner, Public Spaces for All (PSA), received permission to create small playgrounds in two schools as a way of demonstrating the benefits of playing. PSA worked with the schools, teachers, and students to identify the types of activities the children wanted in their play space. They then added swings, climbing equipment, slides, and merry-go-rounds. The students love their new equipment and use it during every break. PSA will use the success of this activity to continue to advocate to the Ministry of Education to add more play spaces to schools in Niger.





Tobacco Control & NCD Prevention



What We Do

We aim to reduce the death and illness caused by non-communicable diseases, of which tobacco and alcohol use are major risk factors.

How We Work

We work on policies and practices to create enabling environments that reduce the risk factors for non-communicable diseases.

Advancing tobacco tax policy

In 2022, advancing tobacco tax policy remained a priority for HealthBridge in Vietnam, including generating evidence to advocate for a mixed tax system (applying both excise tax and ad valorem tax) and raising the tobacco excise tax rate. Work on this issue included raising awareness among policymakers, media, and the public about the harms of tobacco use and the benefits of a mixed tax system. Recent research by



Nguyen Thi An Country Director, Vietnam

HealthBridge and colleagues has led to two published articles: "Socioeconomic inequality in smoking: Evidence from a decomposition analysis" and "The impact of cigarette prices on smoking onset and cessation: Evidence from Vietnam". The findings from the first paper regarding the socioeconomic inequality in smoking revealed that poor men are more likely to smoke and also to smoke more than those who are better off. The second paper regarding the impact of cigarette prices on smoking found that every 1% increase in the price of cigarettes reduces smoking initiation by 1.2%. The key findings from this research add to the body of evidence used to advocate for tobacco taxes and as a result the Ministry of Finance has recently proposed the addition of a specific tax to the existing ad valorem tax on tobacco products in the Excise Tax Law. HealthBridge Vietnam will continue working closely with the Ministry of Finance and other like-minded agencies and partners to advocate for a stronger tobacco tax.

Socioeconomic inequality in smoking: Evidence from a decomposition analysis

The impact of cigarette prices on smoking onset and cessation: Evidence from Vietnam

National smoke-free games in Vietnam

HealthBridge collaborated with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in Vietnam and the Vietnam Tobacco Control Fund to organize the 31st Smoke-free South-East Asia (SEA) Games. The SEA Games featured 40 sports with 526 different events and welcomed about 10,000 people from 11 Southeast Asian countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. Following the success of the SEA Games in 2022, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism continued to collaborate with HealthBridge to conduct the 9th Smoke-free National Games for Vietnam. The National Games were held from December 8-21, 2022, featuring 43 sports and welcoming about 10,000 participants nationwide. Over the course of these two events, hundreds of volunteers were trained on smoke-free sports events, and banners, leaflets and posters on the harmful effects of smoking and second-hand smoking were distributed and displayed at the events, along with radio and video programs. The Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism demonstrated a strong commitment from the government to promote a healthy environment and protect athletes, coaches, spectators, organizers and volunteers from the harmful effects of tobacco. Because the games reach a national audience, they are an effective way of highlighting the importance of smoke-free environments.

HealthBridge Partners Around The World

Mmofra Foundation is a child-centered organization focusing on advocating for health, recreational, social and economic benefits of more equitably distributed urban green space in Accra Ghana.

GHANA

UGANDA

Advocates for Public Space works with local and national government in Uganda to improve the quality and quantity of public spaces including streets that support walking and cycling, local public markets, and open public spaces.



NIGER

Public Spaces for All works with officials in Niamey, Niger in three main areas: streets, local public markets, and parks and open public spaces.



TANZANIA

Urban Planning for Community Change (UPC) works in Tanzania to research, examine and understand local urban realities and issues, and generate a body of scientific knowledge to contribute to urban development.



NEPAL

Left: **Digo Bikas Institute** works in Nepal to ensure people's rights to health and improving the health of urban residents.

Right: International Nepal Fellowship works to bring sustainable improvements in health and quality of life to poor and marginalized people in the western regions of Nepal.







Work for a Better Bangladesh (WBB) works to support policymakers to draft, pass and enforce policies that will help in achieving a healthy population and environment, and to improve equality and social justice.



IPAS Bangladesh works to strengthen sexual and reproductive health and rights, specifically to reduce deaths and injuries related to unsafe abortions.

BANGLADESH

VIETNAM

HealthBridge Vietnam (HBV) works to make cities in Vietnam more livable, improve the health of ethnic minority communities in rural areas, and advocates for policies which safeguard health and well-being.



INDIA & SRI LANKA

Evangelical Social Action Forum (ESAF) in India and ESAF Global work to empower the poor and marginalized, especially women and children, by providing them access to education, finance, health services, natural resources, marketing and technology and to create opportunities for their sustainable development and holistic transformation.







Sexual, Reproductive, Maternal & Child Health and Rights

What We Do

We improve sexual, reproductive, maternal & child health and rights among people living in vulnerable situations.

How We Work

We address the root causes of gender inequality and strengthen policies and practices that promote sexual, reproductive, maternal & child health and rights, including through the engagement of men, boys, family members, and community.

Improving sexual and reproductive health and rights in Dhaka, Bangladesh

HealthBridge is working in Dhaka with Ipas Bangladesh and a team of local partners to address the sexual and reproductive health needs of underserved populations through a multi-pronged approach that targets health system and community-level barriers to SRHR. To date, the project has provided training on family planning services, safe abortion (known locally as menstrual regulation), post-abortion care, and sexual and gender-based violence to 137 doctors and 72 mid-level providers,



Cassandra Morris
Project Manager

which has increased their capacity to address these issues as part of their practice. In addition, the project teams have been working in the community and trained 570 youth volunteers on the same issues. Volunteers have been mobilized through the formation of 57 Community Action Groups and have held events and actively promoted messages on SRHR and gender equality, including how to access services, and have campaigned against sexual and gender-based violence in order to increase awareness and utilization of services. The project aims to train and mobilize a total of 1,000 youth volunteers as key change makers in the community.

Comprehensive sexuality education in Vietnam

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in schools is an important component of improving reproductive health and preventing child marriage. CSE is a curriculum-based process for teaching about sex and relationships that goes beyond learning about just the physical aspects of sexuality, and includes the cognitive, emotional and social aspects of sexuality and relationships. The Vietnam government, with input from HealthBridge, recently released the first-ever national CSE curriculum along with a technical guideline to support teachers in planning and conducting sessions in the classroom. While developing the new curriculum, the project team conducted a workshop with ethnic minority teachers to ensure the content was culturally appropriate. Once the curriculum was finalized, 40 teachers were trained in Son La Province on the content of the curriculum and methods for implementing participatory lessons. School-wide CSE events are being organized in schools to reach all students at once, ensuring all students have access to CSE. The training helped the teachers design these events to be creative and interactive, and to include singing, competitions, quizzes and plays put on by students for students. Because the events are interactive in nature, the students gain a deeper understanding of key lessons. Following an event, one of the students shared: "I really enjoyed the sexual education session, I learned that my body belongs to me, and some ways to get out of risks of sexual abuse, and our teacher organized games for us to play and learn about reproductive health".

Mothers groups in Nepal

In Nepal we work with Mothers Groups to improve reproductive health and prevent child marriage. These groups are important for reaching the community and are where pregnant women and mothers of young children gather to discuss key messages about sexual and reproductive health, essential services for mothers, healthy relationships, and the dangers of child marriage and early child-bearing. In the Kalikot District of Nepal, these meetings occur monthly and are facilitated by local female community health volunteers (FCHV). In Kalikot we work with 34 FCHVs and support 38 Mothers Groups. In the last year, the FCHVs received training on topics including sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, government policies on gender-based violence and child marriage, and practical skills for facilitating Mothers Group meetings. FCHVs are a very important resource for health information in their communities; we work with them to ensure their knowledge is up to date and that they are properly supported.



Health, Nutrition & Food Security



What We Do

We support healthier food systems to address food security and malnutrition.

How We Work

We address the double burden of over and under nutrition through a food systems approach, strengthen food systems towards resilience, and improve child feeding practices, including breastfeeding.

Tackling nutrition challenges in Vietnam through advocacy

In 2022, HealthBridge collaborated with other NGOs and UN agencies to successfully advocate for the approval of the National Nutrition Strategy (NNS 2021-2030) and the National Plan of Action on Nutrition (NPAN 2021-2025). HealthBridge Vietnam provided comments and technical inputs directly to the Drafting Committee for each round of the NNS and NPAN as they were developed by the National Institute of Nutrition in the Ministry of Health, along with partners



Behnoush Ahranjani Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist

including UNICEF, WHO Vietnam, and the Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance Vietnam. As a result of HealthBridge's consistent advocacy efforts, the new NNS and NPAN include objectives and accompanying key measures related to reducing overweight and obesity, including introducing taxes on unhealthy foods and nutrition labelling. For example, key policy measures in the newly approved NNS include a sugar-sweetened beverage (SSB) tax and front-of-package labelling (FOPL) for all packaged foods. The NNS serves as the background document which can be referenced as we advocate for further legislative documents on SSB tax and FOPL. In light of this success, HealthBridge was recognized by the National Institute of Nutrition for its key role in advocating for SSB tax and FOPL in Vietnam.

Urban farming in India

HealthBridge's local partner in India, ESAF, began their urban farming program in 2018 to create awareness of the importance of sustainable agriculture among government officials. During the COVID-19 pandemic government officials began supporting this program as a way to address food insecurity in Malappuram, Kerala. ESAF worked with the local community to establish urban organic farms and larger-scale community farms in rural areas and worked to strengthen their links to the informal local markets so the community would have access to safe and healthy food. In Malappuram, ESAF began working with 117 low-income families to grow 15 varieties of vegetables such as green cabbage, sponge gourd, black pumpkin, and banana ginger. They grow approximately 65 kg of vegetables per week. The farming families consume some of the produce and the rest is sold at a local farmers market. ESAF worked with the local government to organize this weekly market for local organic farmers. In total 52 farmers are participating, including the urban farmers. As of October 2022, these urban farmers had sold 2,890 kg of vegetables at the market and made approximately 125,000 INR (~\$2000 CAD). This program has increased low-income families access to healthy foods and improved their income. Moving forward this program will continue to support families to grow their own food and aims to convert unused land in the city into productive farmlands.

Farmers markets in Dhaka

With financial support from the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), our partner, Work for a Better Bangladesh (WBB) Trust conducted a pilot project to create one farmers market in Dhaka City. Upon successful completion of the pilot, FAO then supported WBB Trust to create an additional 15 farmers markets in greater Dhaka for a total of 16 markets in the city. The farmers, trained in growing "safe" food, bring their fruits and vegetables weekly to the city to sell directly to consumers. Farmers benefit from the trainings provided and from the opportunity to meet their consumers; consumers appreciate the high-quality produce and the chance to form a connection with growers; and community members enjoy a colourful and attractive public space (outdoor market). Starting 15 markets while continuing to run the 16th was a major enterprise. The team started a new market each week, which involved meetings with local government officials and the community, recruiting farmers, and identifying an appropriate location for the market itself. In many cases the team had to troubleshoot when the venue was changed last minute or farmers did not show up. Despite the difficulties, the team managed to successfully start a new market every week while continuing to operate the previous ones. As a result, thousands of local residents now have easy access to safe and affordable healthy, fresh food close to their homes and farmers have direct access to consumers without the need for an intermediary.

Photo: Fresh produce market 13

Spotlight: Work for a Better Bangladesh (WBB)

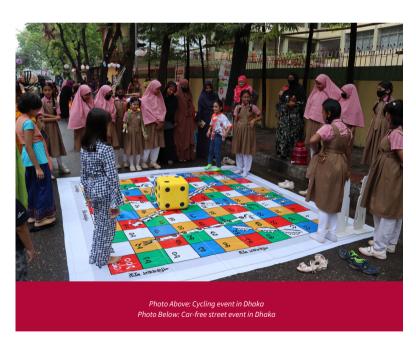
HealthBridge Partner, Work for a Better Bangladesh

Work for a Better Bangladesh (WBB) Trust is a Bangladeshi NGO celebrating its 25th year of advocating for and helping implement better laws and policies to keep Bangladeshis healthier. WBB Trust began to work on livable cities in 2004.

WBB Trust focuses on livable cities, health rights, and improved conditions for people with disabilities. WBB Trust works closely with government agencies, universities, and urban planners to advocate for implementing the Detailed Area Plan for Dhaka City (particularly increasing/improving open public space), Active and Safe Routes to School, and the establishment of farmers markets, with the Food and Agriculture Organization, to bring safe, healthy, affordable food to urban residents.

WBB Trust is widely recognized as a thought leader as well as a successful advocacy organization. It was WBB, in partnership with HealthBridge, that gained attention - in Bangladesh and internationally - to the issue of tobacco and poverty. WBB has succeeded in gaining increased attention to the importance of health promotion and is advocating for the establishment of a Health Promotion Foundation, with more and more allies coming on board. WBB continues to play a major role in tobacco control advocacy, has conducted important research and created publications on healthy food and the promotion of unhealthy diets, and continues to promote livable cities. Most recently, WBB Trust has succeeded in starting a number of mobile playgrounds and has started a couple of weekly car-free street events.





While WBB Trust continues to conduct advocacy for better conditions for walking and cycling, improved public transport, reduced noise pollution, and more and better open public space, it also is seeking ways to sustain the farmers markets established with FAO.

Learn more about WBB Trust here: www.wbbtrust.org

An Intern's Story: A Leap of Faith

By Tamara Udugama

"A leap of faith" is what sums up my desire and excitement to be a HealthBridge Foundation Intern. I graduated with a Master of Science degree in Public Health/Global Health from McGill University in 2020. Since I finished my program at the height of the pandemic, I worked as a medical assistant at a walk-in clinic in Ottawa for a while, and about a year later I went on to find a role in global health as a Development Coordinator for a Canadian global health and social justice non-profit organization based in Toronto. With time, I realized I wanted to expand my skillset in global health with more programmatic knowledge and international experiences. That's when I came across the HealthBridge Foundation's internship opportunity.

Since joining the HealthBridge team as an Intern in the Sexual, Reproductive, Maternal & Child Health & Rights program, I have gained a wealth of knowledge and experience on SRH topics, grant management, proposal writing and monitoring and evaluation. In the last two months, I have mainly supported the HealthBridge Canada and Vietnam teams by conducting background research on nutrition programs to address childhood stunting, collaborated on a project proposal from its initiation stage, reviewed grant reports, and analysed data on HealthBridge's



advocacy efforts to save Hanoi's markets. The most memorable experience so far has been the community visit to Son La Province where the project on "Improving reproductive health & preventing child marriage" operates. Visiting the community so early in my internship helped put things I read about into perspective. It was also a pleasure to meet the community health educators, women's union workers, youth leaders, villagers, government officials and students from the communities where the program is delivered. I was also motivated and inspired by their dedication and interest in learning about safe reproductive health practices, Gender Equality, and Comprehensive Sexuality Education. What also stuck out the most for me was seeing the impact of HealthBridge and the Government of Canada so far away from Canadian soil. It helped me understand Canada's International Feminist Assistance Policy's impact in strengthening vulnerable communities globally.

Personally, I also benefited from being based in Hanoi as it is a great hub for the international development sector. So far, I have attended a women's day celebration hosted by UN Women, a movie screening by UNDP, and a UNICEF event in collaboration with the Vietnam Ministry of Health to appreciate the efforts of midwives in rural ethnic minority communities. I also had the opportunity to attend the International Model United Nations conference held at the British University in Vietnam and experienced the world of diplomacy, international relations and networked with other young professionals in the field of international development. It has also been a pleasure to work with the HealthBridge Vietnam office staff who are all so welcoming and helpful as I adjusted to life in Hanoi. I am thankful to HealthBridge for creating this opportunity for students and young professionals to explore the field of international development and add new skills to their professional development. Since moving to Vietnam, my life has taken a different turn and I am happy to say that the leap of faith has been the best decision I made.

To learn more about internship opportunities, visit: <u>healthbridge.ca/page/get-involved</u>



Project Donors

Thank you to our generous donors for their contributions to the "Improving reproductive health and preventing child marriage in Nepal & Vietnam" project.

This project is in its' second year of implementation to improve reproductive health and reduce child marriage in remote communities in Vietnam and Nepal. With our partner, we have provided health facilities with necessary medical equipment and educational supplies, as well as capacity building for health personnel. In the communities, we are supporting education sessions to sensitize local populations on the importance of reproductive health services, gender equality, and the dangers of child marriage and early childbearing. In schools, creative and student-led events were conducted, including guizzes, games, and plays, to spread key messages to improve adolescent sexual and reproductive health. We would like to express our appreciation to the donors who have been loyal supporters of HealthBridge and our partners for a number of years. Your ongoing support over the years allows us to build long-term relationships with our partners on the ground and to respond quickly and effectively to new challenges as they arise.

We would like to extend our gratitude to the following donors for their support. To donate to HealthBridge, visit https://healthbridge.ca/donate for more information.













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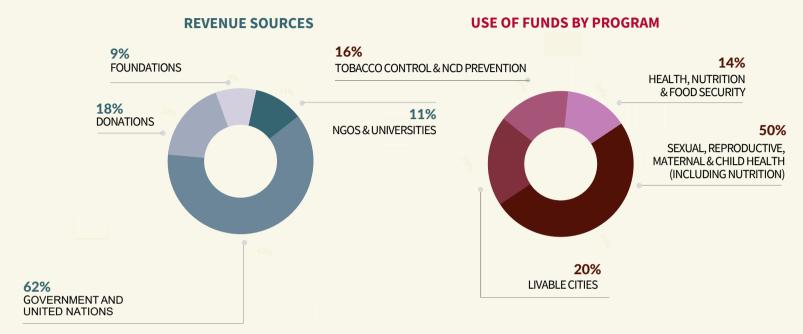
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Financial Summary 2022

The following is an excerpt from HealthBridge's audited financial statements. For more information, please visit www.healthbridge.ca.



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HealthBridge works with partners and communities worldwide to improve health and reduce health inequities through research, policy and action.



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