

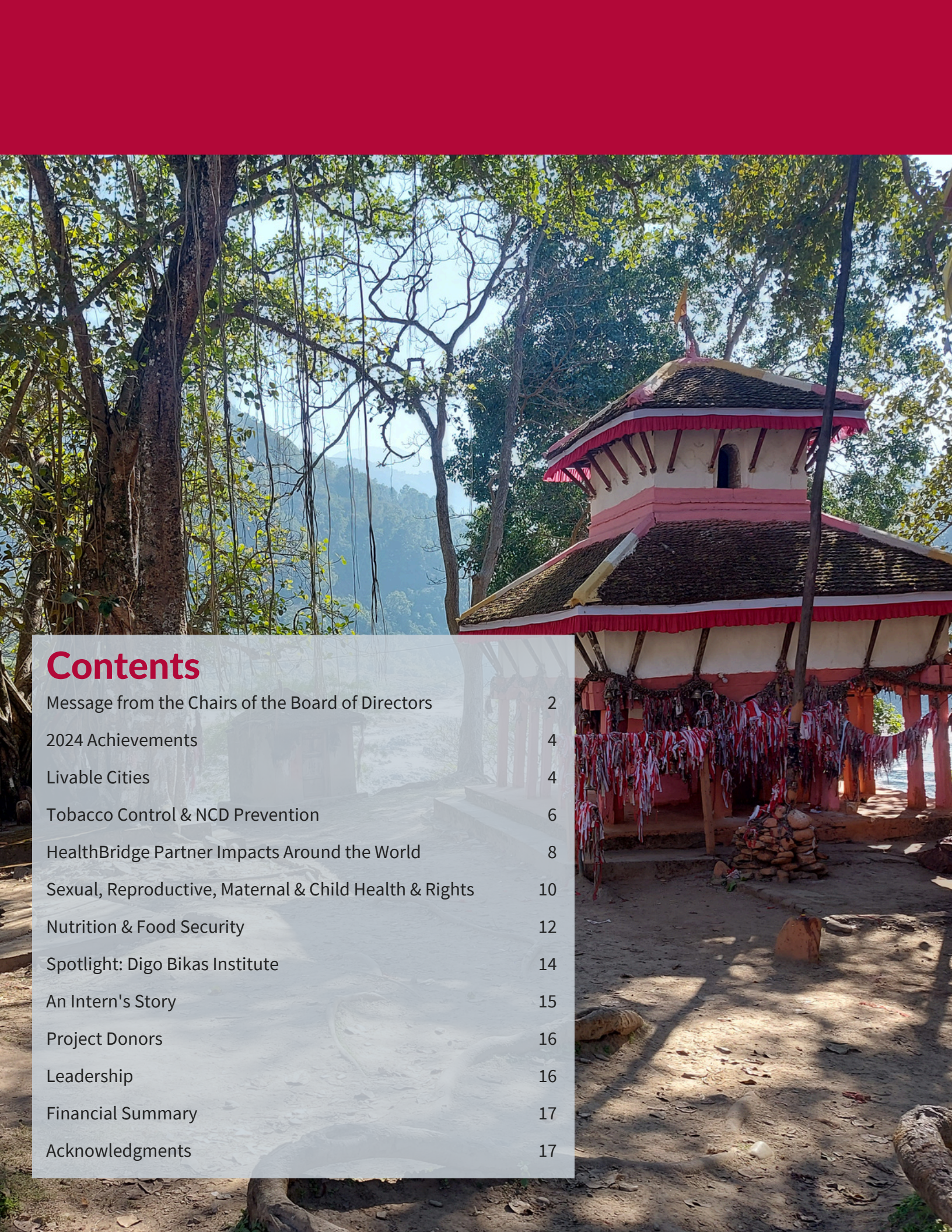


Annual Report 2024



Health and well-being for all people and communities.





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A Message from the Chairs of the Board of Directors



Photo Courtesy: Orvill Adams



Photo Courtesy: Eva Rathgeber

HealthBridge is able to make a difference in the world thanks to partnerships we have developed and nurtured over the years with organizations and individuals around the world. Throughout the years of working with our partners, listening to and learning from them, and adapting to emerging and everchanging needs, we have remained strong.

One achievement that we are especially proud of reflects the culmination of more than two decades of dedication from our staff and partners in Vietnam. In 2024 HealthBridge Vietnam accepted the prestigious World Health Organization “World No Tobacco Day Award”. HealthBridge is one of the pioneering international non-governmental organizations working on tobacco control in Vietnam, and this recognition by the World Health Organization is a testament to our unwavering commitment to tobacco control over the past decades. In addition, HealthBridge Vietnam celebrated 30 years working in Vietnam this year, and on that occasion, we received an award of recognition from the Vietnam Union of Foreign Organizations for our successful contribution to sustainable development in Vietnam.

We are also excited to announce the launch of a Resilient Health Systems project funded by Global Affairs Canada. This project represents the efforts of more than a decade of working alongside our partners in Vietnam, Nepal, and Bangladesh on critically important health issues, particularly sexual, reproductive, maternal and child health and rights. Dedication from our partners and staff in successfully implementing maternal & child health and reproductive health projects since 2010 has led to this achievement and recognition from our government and non-government partners. With this project we will be able to build on previous work supporting health workers and communities, and strengthen youth groups promoting health in their communities, which will allow us to further expand our impact in the world.

We continue our important work in supporting policy for non-communicable disease prevention, including policies related to food fortification and sugar-sweetened beverages. Ensuring full implementation of a food fortification policy is critical for addressing micronutrient deficiencies at the population level and protecting public health. Our partners have also organized nutrition education sessions engaging the whole family in child nutrition in remote communities. These inclusive community nutrition education activities encourage fathers and grandparents, in addition to mothers, to engage in meal preparation and child feeding, leading to a sense of pride among those family members who can see the changes in their child’s healthy development first-hand.

Vibrant public spaces, engaging community markets, and transforming streets have been some of the highlights of the Livable Cities program. In Ghana we transformed public spaces into reading-friendly

environments, in Hanoi we converted a road into a shared community space prioritizing accessibility for vulnerable groups, and in Nepal we transformed a once-weekly market street into a vibrant community hub for social gatherings. The result? More physical activity, more social cohesion, greater accessibility, all of which demonstrates the power of revitalizing public spaces to improve public health and quality of life.

We thank our partners and donors, as well as our Board of Directors, all of whom express trust in us by supporting the work that we do, and by giving their time and insights to the organization. We also thank the staff for their continued dedication and determination, and the passion they bring to their work.

Eva Rathgeber & Orvill Adams
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 middle-income countries to strengthen the policies and programs needed to make cities livable.

2024 ACHIEVEMENTS



Kristie Daniel
Program Director

Engaging Literacy and Public Spaces in Ghana and Sri Lanka

Two innovative projects in Ghana and Sri Lanka successfully promoted literacy and community engagement by transforming public spaces into reading-friendly environments.

In Ghana, the Mmofra Book Stroll brought books into public spaces, fostering family-friendly gatherings and literacy development. Its first installation, featuring children's picture book *Suma Went Walking* in the local language Twi, was showcased at a school during a national literacy event, reaching 2,500 pupils. The mobile installation will continue to travel across Accra, making books more accessible to children and families.

In Sri Lanka, a new accessible reading space in Subramaniam Park integrated benches, eco-friendly structures, and a diverse collection of books. Designed with strong community involvement, the space became a welcoming hub for all, including people living with disabilities. Visitors praised the inclusive design, and the park experienced increased foot traffic, particularly from families and children, fostering unity and engagement.

Transforming a Road into a Vibrant Community Space in Hanoi

HealthBridge Vietnam, in collaboration with Think Playgrounds and local volunteers, successfully converted a road near Chuong Duong Forest Park into a shared community space, prioritizing accessibility for vulnerable groups. Key improvements included bicycle racks, interactive games, tree pots, waste tire benches, and a bamboo shelter built by university volunteers. The project led to a 15% increase in public use, with 20% more children walking in the area and a 10% rise in cycling. Traffic speeds dropped to 20 km/h, and air quality was improved.

The space became a hub for recreation and social interaction, encouraging healthier lifestyles. Recognizing its success in enhancing community well-being, the government plans to expand the initiative. This transformation demonstrates the power of community-led efforts in creating safer, greener, and more inclusive urban spaces.

Revitalizing a Street Market into a Community Hub in Nepal

Digo Bikas Institute successfully transformed a once-weekly market street in Kopche, Dhankuta, into a vibrant community hub used throughout the week. Through community-driven interventions, including life-sized traditional games like Bagh Chaal, Snakes and Ladders, Hopscotch, and Tic Tac Toe, the space became more engaging and inclusive. The project led to a notable increase in foot traffic and social gatherings, fostering stronger connections between generations. Elderly residents and youth interacted more frequently, leading to the exchange of traditional knowledge and the preservation of cultural heritage.

By incorporating local voices through consultations, the initiative created a space that reflects community needs, encourages multigenerational engagement, and strengthens social cohesion. The street now serves as a lively, welcoming space beyond market days, demonstrating the power of small, community-driven interventions in revitalizing public spaces.



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.

2024 ACHIEVEMENTS

Strengthening Tobacco Tax Policy in Vietnam

The benefits of strong tobacco taxation are multiple, including reduced tobacco consumption and improved public health, as well as increased government revenues. In 2024, HealthBridge supported stronger tobacco tax policy in Vietnam through a comprehensive approach that combined evidence-based advocacy and ongoing collaboration among health and non-health stakeholders, including government agencies, the World Health Organization (WHO), civil society organizations (CSOs), and the media.

The Excise Tax Law revision proposal, introducing a specific tax component alongside the existing ad valorem tax on tobacco products, was included in the National Assembly agenda and reviewed at the National Assembly session in November 2024. When it is passed, it will be a pivotal step in reforming the tobacco tax system in Vietnam and in using fiscal policy to improve public health.



Nguyen Thi An
Country Director, Vietnam

Innovative Financing for a Health Promotion Fund in Vietnam

Over the past year, HealthBridge has advocated for establishing a Health Promotion Fund in Vietnam. A dedicated fund for health promotion offers a sustainable mechanism to support preventive health initiatives and improve population health outcomes. Through research and targeted advocacy efforts, important foundations were laid to support the creation of such a mechanism. For example, a comprehensive cost-effectiveness report demonstrating the value of long-term funding for health promotion was developed for advocacy purposes; an in-depth policy and legal review identifying gaps and offering recommendations to strengthen how resources for health promotion are allocated was conducted; and the development of an advocacy factsheet summarizing key evidence and lessons from international experiences was disseminated. These tools have helped inform decision-makers and support ongoing discussions about sustainable funding for health in Vietnam.

Recognition for HealthBridge's Significant Contribution to Tobacco Control

In recognition of HealthBridge's significant contributions to tobacco control, HealthBridge Vietnam proudly received the 2024 World Health Organization World No Tobacco Day Award.

This award recognizes over twenty years of HealthBridge's tobacco control efforts in Vietnam to improve public health. Tobacco use is a leading preventable cause of death and a major contributor to non-communicable diseases, disproportionately affecting those living in poverty. HealthBridge has conducted research and provided evidence on the link between tobacco and poverty to ensure that tobacco control is recognized as a development issue. HealthBridge has also advocated for key measures outlined in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, including higher taxes on tobacco products and smoke-free laws. HealthBridge will continue to advance tobacco control in Vietnam through research, advocacy, and policy.

HealthBridge Partner Impacts Around The World



Photo: Canopy at a farmers market in India

Public Spaces for All supported informal fruit and vegetable vendors in Karadjé Market by providing display tables to improve operations and hygiene. This intervention benefited both vendors and consumers, creating a cleaner and more organized market environment. While long-term impacts on customer retention are yet to be assessed, initial feedback was positive. Vendors appreciated the improved setup and showed interest in personalizing their tables, indicating strong engagement and potential for lasting benefits.

A dedicated farmers market was established by our partner, **ESAF**, within an existing neighbourhood market in Guwahati. Canopies were provided for weather protection, which boosted farmer sales by enabling customers to shop during most weather conditions. The market saw a growth in participation, with 15 female and 5 male farmers expanding their customer base by 50-60 consumers daily. The initiative not only improved local food access but also created economic opportunities for farmers. Its success led the Guwahati Municipal Corporation to commit to expanding farmers' markets citywide, further strengthening community food security and livelihoods.

One vegetable farmer remarked, "Before this market was organized, we used to struggle with unpredictable weather and fewer customers. Now, thanks to the canopy support provided by ESAF Foundation, more people visit our stalls regularly, and our sales have improved. I used to earn very little from selling vegetables, but now I can support my family better. It has made a big difference in our lives."

NIGER

TANZANIA

Urban Planning for Community Change revitalized a public park in Arusha City by adding a toilet, play facilities and benches, making the park accessible to everyone, including low-income residents. Early results show a rise in visitors, thus fostering community interaction. To support sustainability, the community hired a park attendant. The project has enhanced public space use and improved local quality of life.

A school pupil, who is a park user, shared, "A few years back, we'd just walk past this place because it was part garden and part bush. But these days, my friends and I always stop here after school to hang out and relax."



Photo: Young men playing a game at a park in Tanzania

INDIA

UGANDA

Advocates for Public Spaces established a daycare facility in Kasubi Market to support vendors by providing a safe space for about 30 children. This allowed vendors, especially mothers accompanied by their children, to work with greater ease. The initiative also improved market hygiene and organization. Initial evaluations showed strong support from vendors, who appreciated the added flexibility and security. The project has contributed to the improvement of working conditions and a more structured market environment.

One vendor and mother shared, " ...I am so happy that we finally have a place to keep our children safe and close to our stalls in the market. I no longer worry about Kampala Capital City Authority refusing to allow us to bring children to the market. As a single mother, this has greatly changed my life. Even the children are happy. We thank all the people who brought this development to Kasubi Market..."

NEPAL

Female community health volunteers (FCHVs) are locally recruited, front-line pillars of community health programs in Nepal. Our partner, **International Nepal Fellowship**, supports FCHVs with training and resources to enhance the health and education services they provide and improve sexual, reproductive, maternal and child health in the community. FCHVs facilitate Mothers' Group Meetings and conduct home visits to pregnant women and families with young children to discuss critical issues, such as accessing antenatal and postnatal care, proper nutrition from conception to two years of age, encouraging women to deliver in health facilities with a skilled birth attendant, and distributing family planning supplies. One mother in the community shared, "Samjhana [the local FCHV] has been a guide for countless ladies. She encourages all new mothers to attend the Mothers' Group Meeting regularly, so they benefit from the program. She ensures that pregnant women undergo antenatal care checkups according to protocol, advises on precautions during pregnancy... Moreover, she has been an active campaigner in preventing child marriage in our locality."



Photo: FCHV in Kalikot, Nepal

To improve access to SRH services in Dhaka, particularly among underserved and marginalized groups who are less likely to seek care, HealthBridge's partner, **Ipas**, has initiated an SRH telemedicine call center operated by the Obstetrics and Gynecological Society of Bangladesh. Telemedicine clients can receive information, counselling, prescriptions, and referrals to services. As one young mother who had recently moved to Dhaka remarked about her experience: "I was unsure where to get help, but the call center was a saviour. The doctor guided me, and GP ma'am [local general practitioner] was also so cordial and provided me the service with warmth."

BANGLADESH

VIETNAM



Photo: Students participating in an educational performance during a CSE session

Comprehensive sexuality education in schools in Son La, Vietnam, is delivered in unique ways to reach students while minimizing the burden on teachers, who already have busy schedules. Mass education events at schools are regularly organized and feature interactive learning and peer learning activities, such as poster presentations, quizzes, plays, and competitions. One student shared, "I have taken part in various activities and mass communication events focused on topics like puberty, reproductive health and child marriage. At first, I felt a little awkward talking about these things... But over time, I have understood that they are perfectly normal and nothing to be ashamed of. These events have boosted my confidence, and now I am comfortable discussing topics like love and sex..."



Sexual, Reproductive, Maternal and Child Health & 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.

2024 ACHIEVEMENTS

Improving Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Dhaka, Bangladesh

In underserved urban communities in Dhaka, women and adolescents face significant barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. The “Improving SRHR in Dhaka” project has been working to enhance the availability and accessibility of quality SRH services, through a multipronged approach that involves collaboration with government stakeholders, health facilities and providers, and a network of youth volunteers.

Central to the community-based component of the project is the training and mobilization of a network of 1,000 youth volunteers through community action groups. These youth, based in underserved communities of Dhaka, facilitate education sessions with their peers and community members, often in collaboration with project-trained general practitioners. Community awareness sessions focus on SRHR topics such as family planning, how to access services, and sexual and gender-based violence. The youth also organize special awareness-raising events, such as school campaigns and PhotoVoice exhibitions, which use photography and storytelling to engage community members on issues like early marriage, gender-based violence, and unintended pregnancies. Through this network of youth volunteers and other project-supported outreach workers, the project has reached nearly 400,000 people with informative outreach activities.



Cassandra Morris
Program Manager

Improving Reproductive Health and Preventing Child Marriage in Nepal and Vietnam

Health workers are the backbone of the health system, yet without adequate support, they face challenges in delivering essential services. The “Improving reproductive health and preventing child marriage” project has made a tangible difference in the rural, remote and mountainous regions of Nepal and Vietnam, where health workers often operate with minimal resources and poor infrastructure.

In Nepal, health posts lack the necessary resources to offer a full range of reproductive, maternal and child health services, forcing families to travel long distances on difficult roads to reach fully equipped hospitals. Recognizing this challenge, the project has supported rural health posts with necessary equipment and supplies and provided specialized training for local health workers, including skilled birth attendant training and contraceptive implant training. As a result, three health posts in the project catchment area have been transformed into fully operational birthing centers. These centers now provide life-saving care to mothers and newborns, reducing maternal and neonatal mortality and ensuring safer deliveries closer to home.

In Vietnam, community educators serve as trusted sources of information on critical health topics. However, without sufficient training, their capacity to effectively engage and guide the community is limited. To address this gap, the project organized regular training sessions for community educators on a wide range of topics, including adolescent sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, maternal, child health and nutrition, in addition to communication and presentation skills. The community educators also received education materials such as flipcharts, flyers, puzzles and stationery to improve the quality of the education sessions. Empowered with knowledge, these educators are now better equipped to foster meaningful conversations, build trust and promote healthy behaviours within their communities.

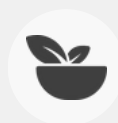
Through these targeted efforts, the project has strengthened health worker capacity, expanded access to essential care and empowered communities with the knowledge and resources they need to improve their health and well-being.



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.

2024 ACHIEVEMENTS



Behnoush Ahranjani
Nutrition Advisor & Evaluation Expert

Engaging the Whole Family in Child Nutrition in Son La, Vietnam

In Son La province, Vietnam, families are coming together to support the health and nutrition of their youngest members. While childcare has traditionally been seen as a woman's role, HealthBridge is encouraging the involvement of men and extended family in caring for and feeding children.

Fathers and grandparents are encouraged to attend the community nutrition education sessions and cooking demonstrations to learn practical and hands-on skills for preparing nutritious meals using locally available ingredients. These sessions have been warmly embraced, with enthusiastic participation from all. The impact goes beyond improved knowledge, families are experiencing stronger support systems at home. Fathers, in particular, are stepping up to share the responsibilities of caregiving and meal preparation. As one mother proudly shared, "My husband is a great cook for the kids... We share the cooking; whoever comes home earlier prepares the meal."

Supporting Policy for Food Fortification in Vietnam

HealthBridge Vietnam has provided technical support to the Ministry of Health to defend and uphold the policy for fortification of food with essential micronutrients. Fortification of foods is an evidence-informed intervention which improves the nutrient content of food and helps prevent micronutrient deficiencies. While the fortification of food has been mandated since 2016 in Vietnam, in practice, it is not yet implemented due to various challenges, primarily stemming from strong opposition from the industry. The industry has lobbied the government to delay the implementation of the mandate or to exempt specific industries altogether due to concerns such as increased production costs associated with mandatory food fortification and claims that fortification changes their product's colour, odour, and overall quality.

HealthBridge has supported the Ministry of Health by providing scientific evidence highlighting the benefits of fortifying foods with key micronutrients, including iodine, iron, zinc, and vitamin A, as well as international experiences and best practices for fortifying foods, to reinforce the importance and feasibility of implementing this policy. Ensuring the full implementation of the food fortification policy is critical for addressing micronutrient deficiencies at the population level and protecting public health in Vietnam. We will continue to work closely with the Ministry of Health, through evidence-based advocacy and by providing technical support, to uphold this vital policy in the face of continued industry opposition.

Supporting Gender Equality for Better Nutrition

HealthBridge helped shape a new resource that is making it easier for organizations to deliver nutrition programs that work for everyone, especially women and girls: an organizational guide for Addressing Gender Transformative Capacity in Nutrition Programming. This Guide addresses a key challenge: while many organizations want to promote gender equality in their nutrition work, they often lack the internal tools and structures to do so effectively. The new guide provides step-by-step support for organizations to strengthen their policies and practices, so that they can better respond to the nutrition needs of everyone. By helping programs become more inclusive and equitable, this work lays the foundation for improved nutrition outcomes, especially in communities where women and girls face barriers to good health and nutrition. This important guideline will improve the design and delivery of nutrition programs, and advance a future where gender equality is recognized as essential to good nutrition for all.

Partner Spotlight: Digo Bikas Institute (DBI)

Building Better Cities for People and the Planet

Digo Bikas Institute (DBI) is a research and advocacy organization based in Kathmandu, Nepal. DBI's goal is to promote ecological sustainability and social equity at both the policy and community level.

Since 2015, DBI has been involved with efforts to improve public spaces. Its “KTM Walks” program encourages walking and cycling as better modes of urban transportation. The initiative supports the creation of streets and public areas that are safe, inclusive, and welcoming for everyone.

One of DBI's key focus areas is transforming streets into spaces for people, not just for cars. In Hadigaun, Kathmandu, the organization's “Carfree Saturdays” have turned busy streets into vibrant areas for play, culture, and community engagement. DBI also introduced “Playborhood,” a safe space where children can play and neighbours can connect. These changes have instilled a sense of pride among residents and revitalized local culture. As a result, the local government has committed to keeping some neighbourhoods permanently car-free.

In Dhankuta, DBI is working with the community in Kopche to bring renewed energy to the area. Through the Kopche Festival and placemaking events, the organization is helping to showcase local art, culture, and traditional placemaking, like weekly markets. These events support small businesses, boost tourism, and strengthen community identity. Kopche is now celebrating its increasingly livable cityscape by preparing for its third annual street festival— a sign of growing pride and success.

DBI's efforts go beyond community-level engagement; the organization also plays a role in shaping city policies. In Kathmandu, DBI has successfully integrated concepts like placemaking and tactical urbanism into the city's official plans and budget, ensuring the sustainability and expansion of its work over time.

What sets DBI apart is its partnership model. The organization works closely with both local governments and community members, believing in equipping people with the tools and support they need to lead change. At the same time, DBI collaborates with decision-makers to develop strong urban policies.

DBI is demonstrating that better cities are possible. By transforming streets and markets into lively, people-centered spaces, the organization is making urban life healthier, more equitable, and more connected. With the continued support of communities, DBI remains committed to building vibrant cities that work for everyone.



Photo Above: Children enjoying a “life-sized” board game at an open streets program in Nepal

[Learn more about Digo Bikas Institute: www.digobikas.org](http://www.digobikas.org)

An Intern's Story

By Lauren Perkins

My journey to interning with HealthBridge was nothing short of a serendipitous one. While pursuing my Master of Public Health degree through the Food Systems, Nutrition, and Health program at the University of Washington in Seattle, I met a member of the HealthBridge team through a project I was collaborating on with Slow Food International.

I was immediately drawn to the organization, excited about HealthBridge's emphasis on community-centered design and bottom-up approaches. Learning more about the organization's work and looking through their resources, I saw a call for interns and knew I had to reach out to the team. During the final year of my master's program, I had the opportunity to intern with HealthBridge remotely from Seattle.



Photo: Lauren Perkins at her final poster presentation on the results of her internship with HealthBridge at the University of Washington

As an intern, I took on two primary projects. The first project was the creation of an evaluation tool for a completed nutrition education series that our partners ran locally in Vietnam. Working with our team members in Vietnam and with Dr. Behnoush Ahranjani, we were able to create a new evaluation tool, integrating innovative methods like picture sorting, to measure program effectiveness. Results obtained by surveying both program participants and community health workers (CHWs) supported the need for a grant extension to continue the project and support further nutrition training for CHWs.

The second project I was able to lead, with support, was the development of a logic model and letter of interest to pursue funding for a project to minimize stunting among ethnic minority children under the age of 2 in Vietnam. While working on the projects was a highlight of my experience with the HealthBridge team, I also had the great opportunity to participate in all staff meetings, which I found to be an invaluable learning experience. I was also provided resources to complete training in results-based management and clear language, which I was immediately able to apply to my work even outside of the organization.

Interning with HealthBridge has shown me that global health work can be done in a way that is truly community-centered and sustainable. I am incredibly grateful to the HealthBridge Canada and HealthBridge Vietnam teams for providing such a supportive learning environment. Interning with HealthBridge set a standard for me regarding qualities I look for in a potential workplace, and I have been honoured to be a part of this journey.

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



Project Donors

Thank you to our generous donors for their contributions to reproductive, maternal and child health and nutrition in Son La, Vietnam.

We are very grateful for the support we receive from our donors which allows us to flexibly respond to gaps in our programming as they arise. In 2024, we focused on providing additional support to health workers in Nepal and Vietnam, and implementing nutrition education sessions and cooking demonstrations in Vietnam. To enable health workers to deliver high quality and reliable services, we provided essential equipment, educational materials and training. In Nepal, this support resulted in upgrading another basic health service center to a birthing center, thus ensuring delivery services for women in the nearby communities. In Vietnam, community educators are continuing to deliver interactive cooking demonstrations which the local community has found practical and informative. We thank all our donors for making it possible to continue supporting our partners in the field.

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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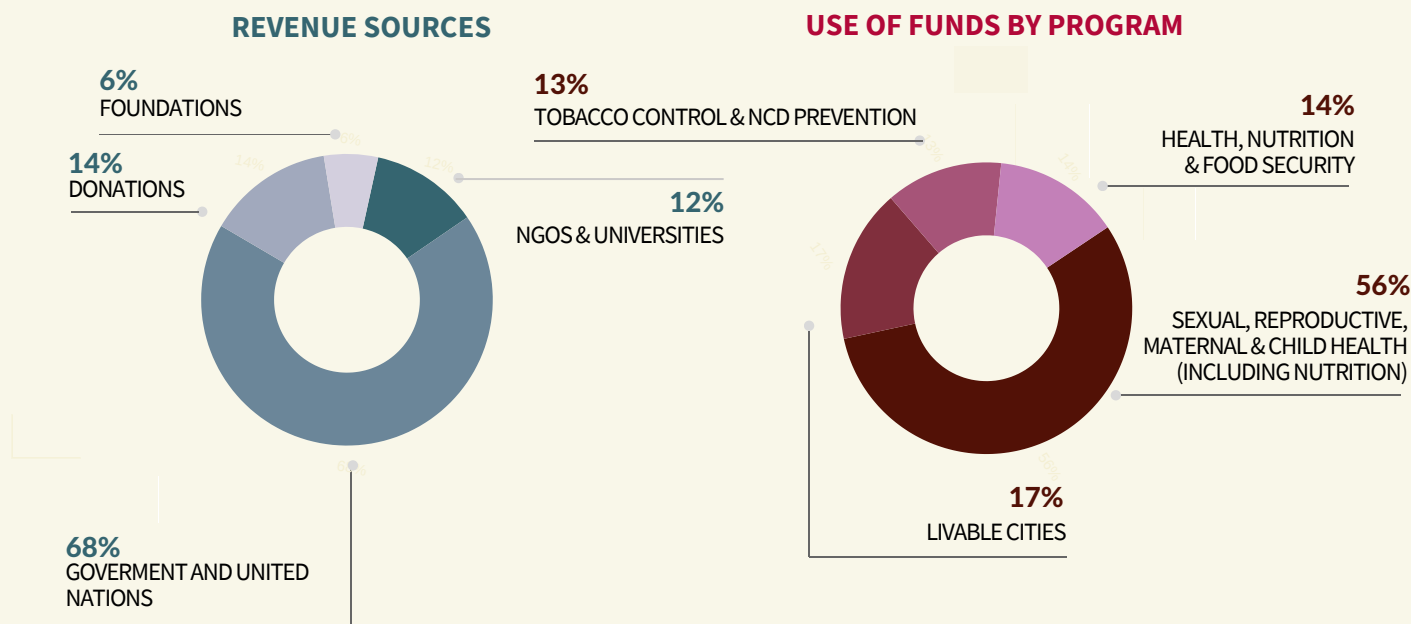
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Financial Summary 2024

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



Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the contributions made by individual donors and the following:

Institutions

Red Cross
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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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