

BRIDGE

Building Rural Institutions that Develop Grassroots social-Entrepreneurs



Building Civil Society in the Villages of Ghana

A nonprofit organization based in the U.S.
with operations in the Volta Region of Ghana

Three-Year Strategic Plan
2007-2009

May 2007

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B.R.I.D.G.E.

Building Rural Institutions that Develop Grassroots social-Entrepreneurs

Vision Statement: Ghanaian villages that possess civil society organizations capable of directing their own development.

Mission Statement: To build sustainable organizations in Ghanaian villages by strengthening the management capacities of local groups, funding their projects, and linking them to funders that can expand their programs.

Who we are: Builders of civil society in the rural villages of Ghana

BRIDGE is founded on the belief that helping reduce poverty in Africa requires a long-term commitment to groups in rural areas by helping them learn the organizational skills needed to grow over time. As long as rural communities lack local capacity to manage programs, they will continually be dependent upon outsiders to provide their basic education and health needs, or worse, these needs go unmet altogether. But when villages possess community-based organizations (CBOs) capable of designing projects and transparently managing budgets, their local governments and international funders suddenly have partners who can effectively utilize their resources. The problems of corruption and mismanaged development dollars are well-documented, and BRIDGE collaborates with groups in rural villages to overcome them. We provide technical assistance through workshops that focus on key organizational skills, award small seed grants to get projects moving, and then help link them to government and other funding sources to expand successful programs. In this way, we help pave the way for groups living in isolated villages to take control over their own destinies.

Although BRIDGE was incorporated in 2003, intensive groundwork began in 1997 when the founding member arrived in the Volta Region of Ghana as a Peace Corps Volunteer. The three-year experience of living in rural villages revealed a system of local norms that encourages collective action, along with the tremendous challenges that isolated communities face in generating and managing resources. Working with local groups day after day in the realm of their realities brought to light the widespread problem of dependence that rural communities place upon outsiders to solve their problems, and the vacuum of skills at the local level needed to manage long-term projects.

The Peace Corps experience offered an opportunity to work closely with village-based groups to transfer essential organizational skills. But three years was simply not long enough for groups to establish sustainable organizations. After returning to the U.S., a partnership with Notre Dame University was initiated whereby students continued building the skills of these CBOs, and helped implement small projects. For two years we trained partners how to host volunteers and utilize their skills in designing projects, writing proposals, managing funds, and implementing small programs. Then, in 2003, BRIDGE was founded using the pilot CBOs as a model for reaching out to new groups.

Since 2003 we have continued growing. A Ghanaian national manages BRIDGE's field office in the Volta Region. The office is equipped with essential tools for partner CBOs, including computers, a printer, and a library on grassroots development. We currently partner with 34 community-based organizations, have sponsored over 600 workshops that have transferred key skills, provided \$25,000 in small grants, and raised \$74,000 through volunteers and private contributions. Johns Hopkins graduate students from the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) have served as interns since 2005. We have rapidly increasing our annual number of volunteers who transfer skills to partners through training workshops and create jobs for their local caretakers and counterparts.

What we do: Taking local ideas and making them work through formal organizations

BRIDGE builds sustainable village-based organizations in Ghana by teaching groups the skills that can transform their development ideas into sustainable programs. Rather than entering a community with a preconceived project, BRIDGE taps local energy by helping residents organize around projects that they have identified as important. There are **three interdependent components of “what we do”** that makes it possible to empower groups in isolated villages:

1. Transferring organizational skills: the capacity for long-term growth

Basic organizational skills are essential for any group wanting to implement a social or income-generating program. For one, they ensure transparency of funds, which has historically been a major impediment to development in Africa. They also help groups set basic rules and delegate responsibilities, which builds trust and encourages members to invest time and energy. Few groups in the villages of Ghana currently operate with the basic skills that provide transparency and encourage long-term investment. As a result, funds are often mismanaged and only one or two members dominate the organization’s activities. The majority of BRIDGE’s time and energy is spent transferring such skills to partners. We use a curriculum that focuses on practical skills, including: accounts management, project design, writing funding proposals, strategic planning, leadership, and partnership development with outside funders. We work step-by-step with partners in teaching the fundamentals, and applying them to their organizations.

2. Providing small seed grants: learning by doing

BRIDGE provides small seed grants to partner CBOs (when funds are available) in order to get well-designed projects off the ground. As groups learn to design a project, create a budget, and write a proposal, BRIDGE funds their initiatives (\$500 - \$5,000) in order to help partners learn by doing in the implementation process. These seed grants also help partners establish a track record. For example, the Adaklu Youth and Education Committee (AYEC) designed a project that provided uniforms to 100 orphans in 2001. BRIDGE funded this project for five years, culminating in a program that reaches 285 orphans with a \$7,000 budget. AYEC’s track record of successful project implementation has been key in establishing credibility, and encouraging other funders to support their program.

3. Linking partner CBOs to outside groups: reaching beyond village boundaries

The final component of our approach is helping partner CBOs link their projects to outside funders like local government and international NGOs. These funders have resources that are earmarked for development activities, however there is often a lack of local groups that can effectively manage these resources. This is why many local projects are managed by outside NGOs, and not by the local citizens themselves. The CBOs we help build provide an avenue for development dollars to get more bang for the buck, and gives reliable CBOs the opportunity to scale up programs, provide social services to their communities, and have jobs for themselves.

How we do it: Curriculum, international volunteers, the Volta Office, and fundraising

Building sustainable organizations in rural villages requires three key resources: **technical knowledge**, **tools**, and **money**. We mobilize each of these essential ingredients through the following means:

Curriculum for Organizational Management: adult education that transfers technical knowledge

The core of BRIDGE’s work is our curriculum for developing the technical knowledge of partners in organizational management. We transfer knowledge through a form of adult education, only we focus on the practical skills that will give partners the tools to develop and manage programs transparently. Our primary areas of focus are on financial management, project design, writing funding proposals, strategic planning, leadership, and partnership development. We conduct annual capacity scorecards to identify weaknesses, and then craft training workshops that address gaps.

International Volunteer Program: Using **technical knowledge** to transfer skills while generating income

The primary means BRIDGE transfers organizational skills to partners is through our international volunteer program. Volunteers from around the world live temporarily (4-16 weeks) in developing countries as a means of gaining experience and learning about other cultures. BRIDGE places volunteers into villages and assigns them to a partner CBO. We provide work assignments, thereby allowing them to collaborate closely with our partners to address specific capacity gaps. In this way, we have a continual stream of highly motivated individuals who provide technical assistance to partners.

BRIDGE integrates volunteers and utilizes their skills through two groups of field agents: Counterparts and Caretakers. Counterparts are the link between partner CBOs and the volunteers. They work hand-in-hand with volunteers in achieving their work objectives, and ensure a smooth transition into the culture. Counterparts design workshops with volunteers, facilitate communication between the volunteer and CBO, and acts as the volunteer's spokesperson to the community in general. Caretakers, in contrast, adopt volunteers into their families and ensure that their basic needs are met. Volunteers live with their Caretaker's family during the entire village experience, making them a part of the community in the truest sense. This is a pivotal cultural link which enlightens volunteers of the common problems citizens face in their daily lives, and develops bonds of friendship and trust between volunteer and community.

International volunteers pay money to participate in such programs. BRIDGE's volunteer fees help us achieve our mission of reducing poverty in several ways. First, it provides income to our Counterparts and Caretakers. Second, and of greater importance to our mission, fees provide workshop stipends (\$35 a week per CBO) for CBO members when meeting with volunteers. This is an innovative part of our program because people living in villages are mostly comprised of subsistence farmers who must spend much of their time on their farms. Since volunteers are present for short periods of time, they need to meet with partners several times a week for extended sessions in order to make progress. For local farmers, this degree of participation would be impossible without these stipends, which allow groups to devote 12-18 hours a week on their initiatives and make fast and focused progress. Furthermore, CBOs have the option to use the stipends for other work-related activities that they normally could not afford, such as transportation costs to the BRIDGE Volta Office to work on the computers or trips to the capital to meet potential funders. This removes a major financial constraint, giving them an unprecedented opportunity to reach outside their communities.

The BRIDGE Volta Office (BVO): providing essential organizational **tools** to partners

BRIDGE's office in the Volta regional capital serves as a point of contact between the home office in the U.S. and partners in the field. The BVO is managed by a Ghanaian national, Mr. Bismark Agbeve, who grew up and continues to live in a rural village. Mr. Agbeve manages the volunteer program, trains and certifies our network of Counterparts and Caretakers, establishes partnerships with CBOs and guides their development, provides oversight to our seed grants, and reports to the home office. He also helps link partner CBOs to potential funders by providing information to both groups on possible partnerships, and providing letters of support for CBOs that have shown strong potential.

The BVO provides partners with computers and a printer, which are invaluable organizational tools. Mr. Agbeve and our volunteers provide training in the use of Word, Excel, and Powerpoint programs. Through the BVO, partners have for the first time the opportunity to write proposals, record accounts, and update and maintain organizational information. The BVO also has a library of development and organizational management information. Furthermore, we maintain an up-to-date list of funding NGOs, including the types of programs they fund and contact information. Between the office manager and the tools within the office, the BVO serves as an invaluable stepping-stone by which partner groups in isolated communities can suddenly reach out to funding partners.

Fundraising: generating **money** that supports the BVO and provides seed grants to partners

Private contributions are our primary means of operating. Building upon an initial donation of \$25,000 from our founding supporter, Mr. Fran McDonald, BRIDGE holds two direct mail fundraisers each year. These fundraisers generate between \$5,000 and \$8,000 each year. The money raised supports the BVO's operating expenses (rent, utilities, transport, and supplies), pays the salary of the office manager, and provides small seed grants to our partners. Our private donor list currently includes 200 individuals, and our contributors are an indispensable part of our program that makes our mission possible.

Field Research: new initiative #1

BRIDGE is incorporating new field research surveys into the volunteer program in order to build our knowledge of the communities we work in. The research tools are based on the World Bank's Social Capital Assessment Tool, which is specifically designed to examine existing resources within communities that can be used for development purposes. This information will help our partners identify and mobilize local resources that already exist for better development outcomes.

Culture Tours: new initiative #2

Our second new initiative involves bringing groups from the U.S. to Ghana to participate in village life. Culture Tours last between 1-2 weeks, and are structured in two formats. In the first, the group will visit a mix of small ecotourism sites around the Volta region, along with the historically significant slave trade castles on the coast. Groups will spend 70% of their time in village homestays and partake in cultural activities, like climbing mountains, hiking to water falls, visiting a monkey sanctuary, and participating in drumming and dance and other culturally stimulating activities.

The second type of Culture Tour will involve groups that spend most of their 1-2 weeks in the same community working with a CBO on a small project. The goal is to give groups an insight into the culture and social life, give them the opportunity to collaborate with local citizens in some hands-on activities like mixing concrete, making bricks, or painting a school, and be involved in cultural activities. Both of these Culture Tours are expected to generate significant income that can be used to support local projects and create jobs for their guides.

Why our work is important: Empowering local groups to reduce poverty

Addressing the aspirations of village residents

The *Voices of the Poor* study interviewed 60,000 villagers in 60 developing countries. Villagers were asked what would make the greatest difference to their lives, and they repeatedly responded: (1) organizations of their own that can collaborate with government and NGOs, (2) direct assistance so they can play a role in shaping their future, and (3) local ownership of funds. In short, poor people in developing countries want to be empowered with their own organizations that are capable of improving the standard of living in their communities. BRIDGE directly addresses these aspirations by helping groups formalize organizations of their own, and then supporting their growth and collaboration efforts with local government and NGOs.

Overcoming the transparency challenge to generate local investment

A longstanding problem throughout Africa is the transparency issue, or lack thereof. Informal groups identify a project, such as raising poles for electricity. They generate funds through local contributions or outside sources. Then, throughout the implementation process, money gets secretly siphoned off by those controlling the funds, thus leaving projects half-finished. This corruption problem is directly tied to the lack of transparency in the management of projects. Groups find it difficult to oversee the flow of funds without clear financial management tools. The lack of bylaws and other formal rules-based structures prevents individuals from getting removed from such projects. Many negative trends result:

projects collapse, outside funders are reluctant to provide funds for local projects, and there is little long-term investment by rural citizens in their projects because of a lack of belief that they will be successful.

By strengthening organizational structures, we empower groups to govern and oversee their own members. Our long-term partnerships rewards their progress through continued volunteer placements and seed grants. We therefore provide incentives for groups to hold members accountable, even members of high status in their communities. Furthermore, members themselves begin to invest more of their time and efforts into their organizations because they believe there is a real chance of success.

Breaking the cycle of dependence

Due to the lack of transparency and the pattern of failed projects in rural areas, NGOs and other funders are often reluctant to provide funding for locally managed projects. Instead, organizations enter communities with preconceived projects that they implement themselves, limiting the involvement of village residents to labor. Villages are too often mere recipients of projects, dependant upon outsiders to address their problems. BRIDGE empowers groups to design and manage programs. In this way, village groups gain the skills to implement projects effectively, and develop real partnerships on their own. When this happens, projects become driven by the aspirations of villagers, and local ownership becomes a reality. These trends break the mentality of dependence upon outsiders to solve local problems. The CBOs that BRIDGE helps create are the vehicles by which rural social entrepreneurs emerge and create enduring change.

Three-year work objectives, goals, and targets, 2007-2009

Objective1: Increase capacity of community-based organizations to reduce poverty.

BRIDGE builds sustainable village-based organizations through three interdependent goals:

Goal 1: Strengthen organizational capacity of village-based groups.

Our primary goal is to build the capacity of partners to manage programs that reduce poverty. Through capacity scorecards, we identify weaknesses and guide volunteers in using our curriculum to overcome them. We have a set of organizational skills we focus on, including financial management, project design, writing funding proposals, strategic planning, leadership, and partnership development. To date we have transferred and strengthened 186 organizational skills to partners. Our three-year target is to transfer and reinforce 2,550 such skills. We will do this by conducting 3,650 workshops through volunteers, and providing \$23,000 in workshop stipends to encourage participation.

In 2005 we achieved our goal of expanding the number of partners we work with, currently 34 CBOs working in 74 communities. Our target in this area is minimal, expecting to partner with eight new groups.

Indicators	Actual Results						Targets			
	Total	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2007	2008	2009	3-year Target
Number of new organizational skills transferred to CBOs	186	4	12	24	64	82	350	800	1,400	2,550
Number of CBO workshops provided	615	106	104	128	157	120	450	1,200	2,000	3,650
Amount of resources supporting CBO workshops	\$2,703	na	na	\$365	\$1,184	\$1,154	\$3,500	\$7,500	\$12,000	\$23,000
Number of CBO partners we work with.	34	3	0	27	3	1	2	3	3	8
Number of communities we reach through CBOs	74	24	0	44	5	1	3	5	5	13

Goal 2: Fund well-planned projects that can help reduce poverty with small grants.

Providing small seed grants helps partners learn by doing, and builds a track record for their efforts. The amount of seed grants we provide depends heavily on the level of private contributions we raise. To date we have provided over \$25,000 in seed grants, and intend on providing \$27,000 in grants over the next three years.

Indicators	Actual Results						Targets			
	Total	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2007	2008	2009	3-year Target
Number of projects funded.	18	2	4	9	3	0	4	6	12	22
Dollar amount in grants.	\$25,847	\$4,000	\$5,128	\$12,340	\$2,582	\$1,797	\$5,000	\$7,000	\$15,000	\$27,000
Social outcomes of funded projects	detailed in Appendix A									

Goal 3: Link partners to groups that can help them achieve their goals.

Our ultimate end-goal is to empower CBOs to the point that they are reaching out to new groups and mobilizing outside funds for local projects. This goal takes more time than any other of our goals, and gives the truest account as to whether we are achieving our mission. With the newly established Volta Office, we have begun reaching out and making contacts with local government and NGOs to educate them about the work of our partners. Our goal is to identify and make 45 contacts with relevant actors, and encourage such groups to invest in partner projects in the amount of \$22,000.

Indicators	Actual Results						Targets			
	Total	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2007	2008	2009	3-year Target
Number of outside contacts made.	15	na	na	3	7	5	15	15	15	45
Dollar amount funded from other organizations (gov't, NGO)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,000	\$5,000	\$15,000	\$22,000

Objective 2: Increase BRIDGE's impact in Ghana

Our first objective is to empower local groups, our second focuses on increasing our own ability to so.

Goal 1: Increase placement of volunteers

Our volunteer program is vital to our ability to transfer skills and generate income. In 2006 we achieved a number of our goals, such as training and certifying a cohort of 70 Counterparts and Caretakers, which impacts the number of volunteers we can absorb at a given time. Currently our system is in place, and we are ready to receive much larger volumes of volunteers. Our major areas of focus over the next three years will be to increase the number of universities and volunteer organizations that send volunteers to our sites, and to place 185 volunteers, generating over \$100,000 in revenue.

Indicators	Actual Results						Targets			
	Total	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2007	2008	2009	3-year Target
Number of volunteers placed.	43	4	10	3	6	20	25	60	100	185
Number of volunteers we can absorb at any given time.	65	8	0	50	5	2	3	4	5	12
Number of partner volunteers orgs and universities	3	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	3

Goal 2: Increase research on CBO and partner community capacities

A new initiative starting in 2007 will be integrating field research surveys into our volunteer program. The information we gain through these surveys is expected to greatly enhance our ability to address capacity gaps and assist groups in mobilizing local resources. The research tools were adapted from the World Bank Social Capital Assessment Tool (SOCAT), and were specifically designed for grassroots development efforts by giving a clearer picture of the existing resources available in rural communities that can be mobilized for development efforts. Our goal is to conduct 925 field surveys.

Indicators	Actual Results						Targets			
	Total	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2007	2008	2009	3-year Target
Number of field research surveys conducted.	39	0	17	4	6	12	125	300	500	925

Goal 3: Generate resources to fund poverty reduction projects

Our final goal is to continually work towards generating income to support our workshops, Volta office, and seed grants to partners. Through private contributions, the volunteer program, Culture Tours, and Cultural Products, we aim to generate \$156,500 over the next three years. Of this, we anticipate providing \$88,000 in salaries for our Counterparts, Caretakers, and office staff.

Indicators	Actual Results						Targets			
	Total	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2007	2008	2009	3-year Target
Amount of income generated from private contributions.	\$48,155	\$5,022	\$30,436	\$4,525	\$8,172		\$10,000	\$13,000	\$17,000	\$40,000
Number of fund drives held each year.	8	2	2	2	2	0	2	3	3	8
Amount of income generated from volunteers	\$23,475	\$2,000	\$2,734	\$6,368	\$6,932	\$5,441	\$15,000	\$35,000	\$55,000	\$105,000
Amount of income generated from Cultural Tours	\$585	na	na	na	\$475	\$110	\$0	\$3,000	\$7,000	\$10,000
Amount of income generated from online Culture Shop.	\$1,428	\$290	\$0	\$262	\$766	\$110	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$1,500
Total income generated from contributions, volunteers, products, and tours	\$73,643	\$7,312	\$33,170	\$11,155	\$16,345	\$5,661	\$25,500	\$51,500	\$79,500	\$156,500

Income and Expense Targets 2007-2009

The volunteer program is expected to generate the majority of income over the next three years at \$105,000. These revenues will cover CBO meeting stipends, pay for Counterpart and Caretaker salaries and expenses (like providing volunteer meals), and pay office staff salaries. Our goal of raising \$40,000 in private contributions over three years will determine the level of seed grants we can provide partners to get their projects off the ground. Contributions will also likely cover a small portion of office staff salaries. Finally, profits from our new Culture Tours initiative will cover Volta Office operating expenses.

INCOME		EXPENSES	
\$105,000	Volunteer Fees	→	CBO Meeting Stipends \$23,000
		→	Counterpart and Caretaker salaries \$67,500
		→	Volta Office staff salaries \$21,000
\$40,000	Private Contributions	→	Seed Grants \$33,000
		→	Volta Office operating expenses \$7,500

Operating Expense Budget for the BRIDGE Volta Office in 2007

BRIDGE's operating expense budget for the field staff and Volta office for 2007 is \$6,300. Minor expenses from the U.S. home office for post, website, and fundraising costs are expected to reach \$500.

Account	Sub-account	Cost
Salaries	Office Director	\$3,400
	Program Assistant	\$1,144
	sub-total	\$4,544
Operations	Rent	\$920
	Utilities	\$55
	Supplies	\$40
	Transport	\$320
	Internet	\$175
	Printing	\$115
	Post	\$20
	Misc.	\$150
	sub-total	\$1,795
Total Budget		\$6,339

APPENDIX A Seed Grant Accomplishments to Date, 2003-2006

PROJECT	AMOUNT	OUTCOMES
Orphan Fund	\$8,115	New uniforms and school fees for 285 orphans over four years.
Scholarship Fund	\$6,051	Seven high school scholarships (3 years each) for seven students.
Kente Initiative	\$2,555	One year of vocational training, tools and supplies for four youth in kente weaving.
Youth Center	\$2,511	Construction of a youth center from foundation to roof.
Carving Initiative	\$800	One year of vocational training, tools and supplies for four youth in carving.
Brochure Fund	\$500	Provided 2,000 marketing brochures to a local eco-tourism initiative.
Adult Education Scholarships	\$1,000	Provided one year of English and computer training to grassroots organizers.
CBO Meeting Stipends	\$3,113	Supported 615 workshops training grassroots groups in key management skills.
Wheelchair Initiative	\$100	Transport of 40 wheelchairs to needy people in rural villages.
Counterpart & Caretaker Training	\$315	Training and certification of 70 Counterparts and Caretakers.
TOTAL GRANTS	\$25,060	

APPENDIX B
Staff and Board of Directors

<u>BRIDGE Staff</u>	<u>Board of Directors</u>
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Elena Panaritis Private/Public Sector Specialist World Bank	Carol Wessner Institute for Policy Studies Johns Hopkins University