

A Call to Action

for Health, Environment, and Development Leaders

A Report by the Bridge Collaborative



BRIDGECOLLABORATIVE

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Our world is changing. Ongoing economic, technological, and demographic shifts are altering the nature of today's major, global issues and challenging us to rethink our past and current approaches to solving them. The world's population is increasing rapidly, and individuals are living longer than ever before. As our planet becomes more populated and prosperous, the demand for finite resources—such as water, energy, and food—are increasing rapidly. These trends escalate the urgency to find new ways of addressing persistent and growing challenges.

Despite decades of evidence generation and progress on global challenges such as poverty, malnutrition, pollution, climate change, and humanitarian crises, these issues persist—and are intensifying in many cases. The current research and policy systems inhibit integrated approaches to problem solving. Too often, the health, environment,

and development sectors work independently setting narrowly defined objectives and failing to consider consequences outside of their own sector. Moreover, training and professional incentives reinforce siloed expertise, and funding streams fail to support cross-sectoral work. While many efforts have made progress in bringing sectors together, the pace and scale of today's challenges prove there is still more work to do.

The Bridge Collaborative links experts in the global health, environment, and development fields to tackle one of the largest remaining challenges for cross-sector impact: our fragmented evidence base. We aim to develop an approach that spans across these interdependent sectors to generate a shared evidence base that will inform strategies, shape policies, reduce unintended negative consequences, and direct funding decisions for more sustainable and equitable development. With the release of our *Principles and Guidance for Cross Sectoral Action Planning and Evidence Evaluation*¹, we contribute to a growing movement aimed at increasing cross-sectoral collaboration focused on shared evidence.

We invite you to share expertise and insights that will strengthen the work of the Bridge Collaborative by committing to:

Joining us in synthesizing existing evidence and conducting rigorous case studies across traditional boundaries.

Championing removal of structural barriers to cross-disciplinary action within your space.

Helping to refine the Bridge Collaborative's *Principles and Guidance* for accelerating shared action.

To amplify impact, we must learn and adapt to new ways of working together by challenging ourselves to collaboratively design solutions responsive to the interlinkages among the root causes of poverty, human suffering, and environmental degradation.



I. The Case for Action

Lack of cross-sector collaboration has limited our ability to adequately address the many challenges that impact human health, development, and the environment. Several examples illustrate the interlinkages of these sectors.

Human and Environmental Health

One in four children die every year from causes linked to an unhealthy environment.² Many of the top environmental determinants of disease today are also key drivers of global biodiversity decline. For example, in 2015, 2.3 billion people lacked access to basic sanitation.³ This lack of sanitation and poor wastewater treatment also drives significant declines in freshwater biodiversity.⁴ Worldwide, 23 percent of human deaths were attributed to environmental factors as of 2012—an issue disproportionately faced by lower income countries that have the fewest resources to combat it.⁵ Climate change threatens the well-being of our natural environment, and it is also predicted to cause an additional 250,000 deaths per year between 2030 and 2050.⁶

Nutrition, the Environment, and Population Trends

Many populations are undergoing dietary transitions characterized by increased access to processed, energy-dense foods.⁷ As a result obesity is on the rise worldwide. In 2014, more than 1.9 billion adults were overweight,⁸ and diet-related non-communicable diseases are quickly becoming a significant burden for many populations. At the same time, hunger and undernutrition persist—with approximately 795 million people undernourished, 462 million people underweight, and 155 million children under age 5 suffering from chronic malnutrition in the form of stunting.^{9,10,11}

Many developing countries face multiple burdens of malnutrition—obesity, acute and chronic undernutrition, and vitamin and mineral deficiencies.¹² These issues are further intensified in the 47 least-developed countries, which are expected to see populations double by 2050.¹³ The same global food system that impacts human health is a significant contributor to global water pollution, land degradation, water consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, overfishing and the loss of biodiversity.^{5,14}

As global population numbers rise, our food system will become increasingly unsustainable. At the same time, unmet demand for family planning and reproductive health services persists, restricting the reproductive rights of women around the world.¹⁵ New or scaled solutions are needed, especially in countries that contain the highest unmet demand for contraceptives, the fastest growing populations, and where populations are part of ecosystems that are most vulnerable to climate change.¹⁶

Energy, Air, and Economic Consequences

For the 3 billion people who cook and heat their homes using wood, coal, and biomass, household air pollution continues to have grave consequences for their health. Essential fuels for many low-income households are lethal to people and forests. There are about 3 to 4 million deaths directly linked to household air pollution each year.^{17,18} Use of solid fuels like wood, coal, and dung also impacts air quality in the broader community, contributing up to 30 percent of ambient/outdoor air pollution in China and India.¹⁹ These challenges also carry enormous economic costs. For example, exposure to household air pollution was estimated to cost the global economy more than \$5 trillion USD in 2013.²⁰ Fossil fuels are reducing the quality of the air people breathe, causing disease, and destabilizing the climate.

Joint Action for the SDGs

In view of this complexity and growing costs, new voices are calling for joint action.²¹ The often-siloed approaches of the past are no longer sufficient to achieve sustainable and meaningful positive change for the future. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—which aspire to a more integrated approach to addressing poverty by improving economic, social, and environmental conditions—are a key example of this movement. The SDGs have communicated a clear message that ‘business as usual’ is no longer an option. Our collective ability to achieve the SDGs and other global goals rests on a significant paradigm shift in science and practice. To amplify impact, we must learn and adapt to new ways of working together by challenging ourselves to collaboratively design solutions responsive to the interlinkages among the root causes of poverty, human suffering, and environmental degradation.

II. The Bridge Collaborative: Filling an Evidence Gap

The Bridge Collaborative links experts in the global health, environment, and development fields to tackle complex global challenges through a shared evidence base. Founded in 2016, the Bridge Collaborative sources input from more than 150 researchers and practitioners working in more than 90 organizations. In the first year of work, the Collaborative created practical guidance for designing strategies and actions that work across sectors. The Collaborative is led by four organizations with complementary expertise:

- **Duke University**
- **The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)**
- **The Nature Conservancy**
- **PATH**

The Bridge Collaborative was founded on the hypothesis that the potential and power of cross-sector collaboration can be unlocked through the creation and use of a shared evidence base to guide decisions. With the release of our *Principles and Guidance*, we introduce recommendations to test this approach across health, development, and environment sectors. This shared evidence base can inform strategies, shape policies, and direct funding decisions for more sustainable and equitable development.

Cross-sectoral collaboration is not a new concept. We recognize the vast network of actors who are documenting the interlinkages between sectors and actively exploring

new ways to work together to collectively tackle enduring global challenges. These many actors include non-profits, private companies, national governments, research institutions and knowledge networks, foundations, multilateral and bilateral entities, and coalitions and collaboratives. Many organizations have already begun to investigate how best to integrate both their work and their institutional structures by breaking down siloes for greater impact.²² Increasingly, global alliances and collaborative efforts are exploring solutions to complex and interconnected problems and building platforms for dialogue across sectors.

Building upon these efforts, the Bridge Collaborative aims to fill a gap through a focus on shared evidence. We intend to reinforce the work of past and existing efforts by using our *Principles and Guidance* to further develop an integrated evidence base and pilot innovative program designs based on it. The *Principles and Guidance* offered by the Bridge Collaborative could be applied to a wide range of challenges including the multidimensional issues related to sea level rise, the global energy transition, or the frontiers of human and planetary health. The Collaborative's advances will help facilitate the development of integrated results chains across the health, development, and environment sectors, allowing decision makers to adopt a broader view of interconnected challenges to design more effective solutions. Further, the Collaborative's shared evidence evaluation rubric will enable researchers and practitioners facing these challenges to review the evidence across sectors and help guide evidence-based action.

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Unified Evidence—The Bridge Across Sectors

The Bridge Collaborative has developed a **standardized way to create results chains** across the health, development, and environment sectors. Results chains reflect causal relationships between an action and its impacts within a system. Compatible results chains can unlock significant potential for more efficient and effective cross-sector action.

The Bridge Collaborative has also introduced an **evaluation rubric for the assessment of evidence across sectors**. This rubric will improve

consistent interpretation of findings from multiple sectors and allow actors to expand the view of what solutions work across sectors. The proposed rubric closely follows the confidence frameworks of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and the US National Climate Assessment. The Bridge Collaborative evidence evaluation rubric can be systematically applied to the development of results chains across all sectors.¹

III. Next Steps

Looking ahead, the Bridge Collaborative will continue to work toward the development and use of evidence in designing collaborative solutions to our world's greatest and most persistent challenges. Building on the work of others, we will spur the use of evidence across sectors with our initial *Principles and Guidance*, strategically activating the knowledge we have today for greater impact.

We invite you to join us in synthesizing existing evidence to reveal interventions that already provide multi-sector

impacts. We also encourage you to apply the *Principles and Guidance* to rigorously test the economic case for strategic, cross-sectoral collaboration and share stories of successes and failures. Ultimately, we hope that you will find the *Principles and Guidance* helpful as you lead the way in your areas of expertise. Our efforts together will shift the systems generating and using evidence so that cross-sector thinking becomes commonplace, and we more rapidly and effectively solve the challenges facing people and the world we share.



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