



# Africa Bridge's Integrated Village Development Model

## Africa Bridge in Tanzania

Africa Bridge is a US- and Tanzania-registered NGO that works in remote villages of the Tanzanian southern highlands. It has been supporting integrated village development projects since 2005, and has helped improve the lives of over 5,500 orphaned and vulnerable children. Where Africa Bridge works, villages are isolated, roads are poor, there is no electricity, literacy is limited, farming is primarily subsistence, and HIV/AIDS incidence is high.

## Brighter Futures for Vulnerable Children

Africa Bridge's mission is to improve the lives and futures of children made vulnerable by poverty and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Africa Bridge does this by creating new village institutions to assist children and their families, and by strengthening the abilities of households to earn sustainable farm-based livelihoods.

## Africa Bridge's Village Development Model Is Integrated & Sustainable

Africa Bridge has developed an integrated model aimed at improving the lives of most vulnerable children and their guardians. The model relies on deep engagement with the community (and especially children), partnerships with local government, sustainable village structures that are active socially and economically, and adherence to a limited project timeframe.

The approach developed by Africa Bridge is delivered under the policy umbrella of the Tanzanian national government, as provided in the National Costed Plan of Action for Most Vulnerable Children, and associated policy documents.

Through 2017, Africa Bridge has started or completed projects in 21 villages, bringing on-going benefits to over 35000 vulnerable households.

## Up-Front Community Engagement

Before every Africa Bridge project begins, there is close consultation with District officials, to identify wards (clusters of villages) with highest needs and fewest outside resources. Once a ward is collaboratively selected, Africa Bridge commits to work with all villages in the ward for a five-year project period.

A project begins with intense community engagement, starting with a three-day Future Search process with children, ages 10 to 20, representing all the villages of the ward. Future Search enables the children to describe the lives they lead, their aspirations and dreams, and their ideas for change. The children's agenda forms the basis of a follow-up three-day Future Search with adult stakeholders in the ward. The result is a community plan and the appointment of a Ward Steering Committee to guide its implementation for five years.

## The Central Engine for Self-Sufficiency: Two Linked Village Institutions

At the center of Africa Bridge's model is the creation and support of two new institutions in each village: a "Most Vulnerable Children (MVC) Committee," and one or more agricultural cooperatives for strengthening livelihoods.

Village **MVC Committees** are volunteers elected by village residents. The Committees are tasked with identifying village households caring for vulnerable children, and developing supportive plans for those households and children.

**Agricultural cooperatives** are established in each village by Africa Bridge to provide livelihoods and long-term economic strengthening for caregivers of vulnerable children.

MVC Committees and co-ops are inter-dependent and mutually supporting, as a result of tight financial and oversight links, as described below.

## MVC Committees and Welfare of Children

Africa Bridge finances MVC Committee start-up costs and provides intensive training to members. Training covers planning, budgeting and banking skills, as well as understanding the plight of vulnerable children.

**Resources for Support.** The Committees in turn educate the village community about vulnerable children and mobilize community contributions for them. The Committees assess the needs of vulnerable families and make tough decisions about allocating scarce resources. With one-time start-up grants from Africa Bridge, they provide uniforms and shoes so children can go to school. They also provide for short-term household needs such as nutrition, shelter support, and legal documents.

**Counseling & Care.** In addition to their community leadership roles, the volunteer members of MVC Committees function as social workers, each visiting a caseload monthly. They monitor the welfare of the children, and counsel and guide them and their guardians.

**Link to Livelihoods.** MVC Committees have another important task: Each year they nominate the neediest guardians in their village for membership in agricultural cooperatives established by Africa Bridge, thereby giving these families opportunities to build sustainable livelihoods.

Africa Bridge staff mentor and support MVC Committees for five years, ensuring they are well rooted before Africa Bridge exits the community.

## Agricultural Cooperatives for Economic Opportunity

To help convert the local economy from subsistence agriculture to cash-crop farming, Africa Bridge establishes up to three agricultural cooperatives in each village. Co-op farmers – all guardians of vulnerable children – grow maize, potatoes and avocado trees, and raise chickens or dairy cows for milk production. These are adapted for the climate and geography of the Tanzanian southern highlands and are appropriate for small-scale farming enterprises.

Africa Bridge has formed over 70 village co-ops, together having nearly 1,500 members. These co-op households are caring for over 3,500 vulnerable children.

**Intensive Agricultural Training.** In these villages, where literacy is low and farms are isolated, knowledge of modern farming practices is limited. In partnership with

local government agricultural extension officers, Africa Bridge provides intensive, hands-on training to co-op members. Villagers who are not co-op members are also invited to take part in these free trainings.

**Start-Up “Loans” & Pay-Back Guarantee.** Africa Bridge provides up-front financing of inputs (high-productivity animals, seeds, or trees, and other inputs) to co-op farmers. This financing is considered a loan that must be repaid in two to four years, depending on harvest or livestock reproduction schedules.

Two mechanisms help ensure that loans are honored: Local government executive officers (who are project partners with Africa Bridge) are signatories to the co-op agreement and enforce loan payback provisions. And, each co-op member is required to name a “guarantor” – a relative or neighbor who promises to assist if illness or other setbacks occur for the co-op member. Depending on the type of co-op, loans may be paid back in the form of animal offspring, a portion of harvest, or cash.

**Built-In Funding for New Co-op Members.** A unique feature of Africa Bridge’s co-op model provides a built-in mechanism for expanding co-op membership. Rather than repay their loans to Africa Bridge, co-op farmers make payments directly back into their co-ops. These payments fund the continuing expansion of co-op membership to other vulnerable village families. In this way a permanent self-funding mechanism for co-ops remains in place in each village.

**Financial & Oversight Link to MVC Committees.** Another feature of Africa Bridge’s co-op financial structure benefits the wider village community. In addition to loan-payback into the co-op, each member has another obligation – to make a payment to the village MVC Committee.

With new farmers joining the co-op regularly, a permanent on-going income stream to these essential village committees is created. The income allows committees to continue assisting needy families who are not yet co-op members.

Because MVC Committees rely on co-ops for funding, they closely monitor the performance of village co-ops. This becomes a powerful local force that strengthens and knits together village institutions.

**Access to Savings & Lending.** Co-ops also establish internal self-administered savings and lending arrangements, giving their members access to short-term loans for emergencies or necessities.

**Private Sector Partnering.** New to AB’s model is a move toward private-sector partnering and connecting co-ops with markets. Our relationship with Rungwe Avocado Company, which harvests our avocado co-ops’ crops for sale to European markets, is a prime example.

### Para-Professionals for Mentoring and Local Capacity-Building

Villagers who learned from Africa Bridge’s programs in its early projects are being recruited today and given advanced training to mentor new leaders in nearby villages. Experienced MVC Committee members are training and advising newly-appointed MVC Committees. Exemplary farmers are conducting trainings and offering continuing support to new co-ops during their first 3 to 4 years. In this way, Africa Bridge ensures that training is relevant, learning is reinforced, and local capacity is developed, thereby solidifying and sustaining gains after Africa Bridge concludes a project.

### Other Features of Africa Bridge’s Model

Other elements of the Africa Bridge model which supplement and reinforce the MVC Committees and co-ops include: HIV peer education for primary and secondary school students; legal protection training, focusing on rights of women and children; environmental stewardship in the form of a reforestation project in partnership with Re-Tree International; and selective infrastructure projects, such as building new classrooms and desks, and building ward medical clinics.

### Partnerships with Local Government

From the first stages of engagement with a ward, Africa Bridge forges close and continuing partnerships with District, ward and village officials. This leverages local expertise, disseminates knowledge, and builds capacity. Especially close teamwork occurs with the District Social Welfare Officer and the Ward Livestock and Agriculture Officer, as well as with ward medical and education officials.

### Independence & Sustainability

Africa Bridge commits to a five-year partnership with each community. Africa Bridge exits with the confidence that sustainable new village institutions are rooted and long-term livelihood opportunities exist for the poorest families. The mechanisms described above keep MVC

Committees funded over the long term and provide continuing opportunities for more families to join agricultural co-ops every year.

### Results

**Household Well-Being.** In 2012 Africa Bridge conducted a survey of 158 households in Masoko ward, comparing those who had participated in co-ops for four years with households waiting to join co-ops. Co-op households were found to be significantly better off on a range of nutrition, health, sanitation, school attendance, and related measures.

Highlights:

<i>Well-Being Indicators for Families &amp; Children</i>	<i>Not in Co-ops</i>	<i>in Co-ops 4 + Years</i>
Families eating meals three times per day in the dry season	11%	96%
Families eating meat, fish, or poultry three or more times per week	31%	79%
Children who have a mattress or a bed	13%	87%
Households having more than 3 hours per week of lamp light	57%	92%
Households owning a radio	32%	60%

**Co-op Sustainability.** In the Africa Bridge model, each co-op member’s personal profitability is postponed in order to finance the entry of new members into the co-op. The effect of this strategy is demonstrated in the records of 8 cow co-ops established in Masoko ward in mid-2008. At start-up there were 90 members in eight co-ops. By the end of 2011 (3-1/2 years after start-up) those original co-op members were able to fund the entry of 31 additional farmers into the Masoko cow co-ops, a 30% increase in membership. Considering membership in all animal and crop co-ops in Masoko, by the end of 2011 sixty percent of vulnerable families were participating in Africa Bridge co-ops. Membership growth continues today.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kf2hWfnd0OQ>

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