GATES INSTITUTE VISION + STRATEGY 2021-2025

Scholarship and Science for Social Change
This document outlines a high-level strategy for the Gates Institute’s work over the next five years, underpinned by refreshed organizational Vision and Mission statements and a set of Core Values aimed to guide all that we do.

Our strategy framework captures core Strategic Priorities representing three areas of work, spanning evidence to impact, in which GI has historically excelled and plays a unique role in the community today.

Equally, it prioritizes a set of three Organizational Commitments through which we will institutionalize best practices in the ways in which we do our work. Ultimately, this document presents a re-imagined role for the Institute that is squarely in service to in-country partners and stakeholders.

“Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhuman.”

-Dr. Martin Luther King

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In 2020, the Bill & Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health (GI) reached the midpoint of our 10-year strategy, which coincided with the global COVID-19 pandemic and resulting key shifts to our work and ways of working. We underwent a participatory process to refresh our strategy, to align it with the vision of our current team and reflect shifts in the broader landscape.

This new strategy is the product of a refresh process that presents an updated vision and mission, and a refined strategic framework, which hones in on a set of core Strategic Priorities. These represent three areas of work, spanning evidence to impact, where GI has historically excelled and plays a unique role today: facilitating knowledge generation, exchange, and use; driving evidence-informed action; and cultivating leadership and learning. To advance these priorities, we will continue to co-lead research, advocacy, convenings, and programs together with country, regional and international partners, focused on strategic opportunities to catalyze the field within this space.

We have also defined key Organizational Commitments through which we will institutionalize best practices in the ways in which we do our work: catalyzing country-owned, locally led solutions; fostering equitable partnerships; and maximizing collective impact. These represent areas that the Institute is already invested in but will lean in on to ensure they are at the forefront of all of our work going ahead. In the short-term, we are also in the process of advancing a number of complementary internal changes to ensure the Institute remains fit for purpose going ahead.

**Overarching Commitment to Anti-Racism**

In alignment with our Organizational Commitments, the Gates Institute remains committed to upholding the collective responsibilities outlined in the Public Health Code of Ethics while meeting the needs of the populations we serve. We will continue our work to actively uncover and address racism, oppression, and discrimination within GI and the systems, institutions, and partnerships in which we operate.

This commitment requires unlearning prejudices and biases and understanding the disparities affecting the populations with which we work as well as transparency and accountability throughout these efforts. Thoughtful consideration will be given in order to ensure the effective execution of the responsibilities captured within this new strategy framework and outlined within our Core Values in section 4.
This strategy also is also framed within an important shift in our work, the expansion from a largely family planning (FP) and reproductive health (RH) focus, to the smart integration of sexual and reproductive health and rights[1] (SRHR) and other related health and development areas (such as maternal and child health, women’s empowerment, nutrition and immunization). This expansion reflects the intrinsic synergies between these issues and the current direction and work of the Institute, and institutionalizes this broader mandate as part of our strategic framing. Going ahead, our work will include breaking down silos between these issue areas, facilitating linkages, and continuing to expand the utilization of our projects/interventions in other issue areas, yet FP/RH will remain at the core of our work. SRHR in particular is a notable addition to our stated mandate, and there is an internal process underway to explore and make recommendations on GI’s engagement in this area.

While this strategy provides a high-level view in terms of how we will advance our mission of investing in new, bold ideas to unlock progress on FP, SRHR, and related health issues in the next five years, we are already in the process of defining what this will look like. For example, GI will introduce new ways of funding development interventions – a shift from traditional project thinking to the creation of platforms for common social good that multiple investors can invest in. Building on the lessons learned from existing programs of the Institute, these could be platforms for rapidly scaling high-impact best practices in field programs, to platforms in advocacy, performance monitoring and convenings. For instance, prompted by the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Institute will build a strong digital platform, where evidence-based best practices and lessons learned across many different functions and different content areas will be curated and right-fitted for portability and easy adoption and adaptation in different cultural contexts, and shared with the global community.

Ultimately, by narrowing our focus on key areas of work that are best suited to the Institute and are expected to have the highest impact, and reinforcing our commitment to excellence in the ways in which we do our work, this strategy presents a re-imagined role for GI in the post-2020 landscape that is squarely in service to country partners and stakeholders.

Founded with the mission of “Scholarship and Science for Social Change”, the Gates Institute has been a trailblazer for innovation in the fields of family planning (FP), reproductive health (RH), and population dynamics for more than 20 years. Situated at the Department of Population, Family, and Reproductive Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (JHSPH), GI is uniquely positioned within a rigorous academic institution, has a strong network of global and country partners, and a track record of positive impact supporting local partner capacity, and translating science and evidence to policies, programs, and practice.

In 2015, GI set forth a 10-year Strategy + Vision as a roadmap to the organization’s mission of conducting and facilitating “cutting-edge research in family planning, reproductive health, and population dynamics, and translates science into evidence-based policies, programs, and practice. The Institute works as an innovator, partner, advocate, and convener to bridge the gap between knowledge and implementation and promote access to universal reproductive health and family planning for all.”

To realize this mission and achieve long-term, sustainable change at the individual, institutional, national and global levels, GI outlined a set of four interconnected and complimentary pillars of work:

- **Fill critical gaps in knowledge and generate new evidence**
- **Translate evidence into policies, programs and practice**
- **Strengthen the next generation of champions**
- **Infuse change through innovative investments and collaborations**

Over the last five years, in collaboration with donors, local institutions, and governments, GI has implemented transformational research, programs, advocacy, leadership, and networking initiatives under these pillars. Key achievements by the Institute and its flagship initiatives have included:

- **Global convenings.** GI co-hosted key conferences and strategic meetings, including **International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP)** and the virtual **Not Without FP Forum** held during the COVID-19 pandemic. These events provided an important platform for guiding evidence-based action, including the transformation of international attention on FP into tangible commitments and investment in the sector, and maintained the global momentum on family planning.
• **Trailblazing research.** GI played a leadership role in building a robust data envelop for FP and RH, filling critical gaps in science and generating new evidence, and utilizing this research to inform practice and drive the FP agenda. GI has been a leader in advancing the **Demographic Dividend** globally and in key countries, as a framework for research, policy advocacy, and resource mobilization to help countries realize their potential for accelerated economic growth.

• **Pioneering infrastructure for data collection.** In partnership with universities, research partners, and resident enumerators, **Performance Monitoring for Action (PMA)** generated frequent, high-quality surveys monitoring key health indicators in nine countries in Africa and Asia. This allows for real-time monitoring of data, and PMA has seen results in terms of evidence-informed decision-making at the country level. While having a core FP focus, this platform has been leveraged for other health priorities, most recently, abortion and COVID-19.

• **Country-led advocacy with multiplier effects.** With its more than 20 partners worldwide, **Advance Family Planning (AFP)** also played a key role in driving decision-making in key countries. AFP’s powerful and influential platform of expert advocates in low- and middle-income countries have led to incremental policy and funding decisions on FP, raising the bar for progress.

• **Cultivating young leaders.** Identifying, cultivating and celebrating young champions is another area in which GI has excelled. The Institute has long supported the development of current and future RH professionals and policymakers, at the individual and institutional levels, arming them with the skills to develop new knowledge and champion evidence-based change at the country level. GI’s newer youth-focused initiatives, for example **120 Under 40** and the **International Youth Alliance for Family Planning (IYAFP)**, have provided additional opportunities for youth to lead positive change on SRH in their communities and countries.

• **High-impact FP solutions.** The **Challenge Initiative (TCI)** has offered a unique approach to improving RH/FP services in urban slums in 14 countries. TCI’s demand-driven and city-led model, which is implemented through regional partners, has empowered local governments to rapidly and sustainably scale best practice health interventions on FP.
THE WAY FORWARD

Drawing on this rich experience and the trajectory of the field more broadly, the Gates Institute has refreshed our vision, mission, and values, which will serve as our north star for the next five years and beyond.

VISION: The Future We Strive For

A future where scholarship and science improve health and transform lives at scale.

We envision a world where evidence-based policies, programs, and practices drive social change in SRHR, health, and development to save lives millions at a time.

MISSION: The Contribution of the Gates Institute

We invest in bold ideas to unlock progress on family planning, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and related health areas.

We cultivate new ways of thinking and doing to amplify locally led change. Together with local partners, we identify and act on ideas with the greatest promise to advance universal, equitable access to SRHR and enhance well-being.
CORE VALUES: The Beliefs Guiding our Work

**Equity**
We believe all people should be treated equally and equitably. We therefore work within our sphere of influence to dismantle systems-level barriers that promote inequality across race, ethnicity, gender, class, ability, geographic location, and other categories of marginalization. Internally, we strive to be an institution where all people – especially those who are historically marginalized, disenfranchised, or excluded – can thrive. Within this lies a focus on accessibility in terms of language justice for all partners with which we work.

**Interdependence**
We recognize the value of diversity in voices and ideas in advancing sustainable progress toward the Institute’s vision. We therefore work through a collaborative approach, focused on building a team-wide and partner-wide understanding of and focus on shared goals. Internally, we cultivate an institutional culture of respect, trust, and mutual accountability as we work together for the greater good. As a US-based institution, we believe it is our job to listen, support, and amplify country-based work and stakeholders, leading only in specific areas where we have unique value-add, and balancing power and sharing credit along the way.

**Excellence**
We believe that evidence is a foundation for excellence. With this as our guide, we pursue solutions that achieve the greatest impact with the least resources. Internally, we track and measure progress, and leverage learning and synergies across our work to multiply impact. We prioritize solutions that are informed by the most up-to-date data and local knowledge, plan for sustainability at the onset, and strive for scale to drive change for the most people.
The Gates Institute’s strategy is framed by three Strategic Priorities that guide what we do, and three Organizational Commitments that inform how we do it, in support of our mission. All of our work – whether it is research, advocacy, or programming – will ladder up to and/or influence all six areas.
Strategic Priorities

Our Strategic Priorities leverage the Gates Institute’s unique value-add, capturing areas where we have historically excelled, with a narrowed focus on the needs and opportunities within the current landscape.

Facilitate knowledge exchange, generation, and use

The Gates Institute conducts and facilitates cutting-edge research and performance monitoring.

Research that answers questions for social change continues to be one of the cornerstones of our work. We work with country partners to utilize a range of research techniques – including implementation science and other innovative methods – and synthesize evidence for real-time tracking, decision-making, and accountability. Our goal is to not only generate new knowledge and insights that advance the field and influence sound policies, but to contribute to a sustainable research and performance monitoring infrastructure and culture within countries.

Drawing on our rich history of research excellence and our affiliation within Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, in the next five years we will work with institutions around the globe to produce high-quality, game-changing research on SRHR and economic demography.

Through the implementation of our ambitious, people-centered research agenda, we will support research partners in key countries to identify and fill knowledge gaps in priority thematic areas: population dynamics, fertility, contraceptive security, and policy and funding. This agenda – which has been informed by end-users, country advocates, programs, and communities – will be implemented through the following actions:

- Conducting high-quality, game-changing research to maximize impact and contribute innovative, business-unusual approaches to the broader field.
- Translation and dissemination for diverse audiences and provide a platform for researchers, professionals, policymakers, and other audience members to convene and share their work.
- Establishing a Gates Institute Research Fellowship to build the capacity of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers.
- Enhancing and diversifying research funding mechanisms for SRHR researchers to support SRHR within GI and globally.
**Drive Evidence-Informed Action**

**We collaborate with partners to bridge the gap between new knowledge and evidence-based policy, programs, practice.**

At the global, regional, and country levels, the Institute engages with partners on the use of evidence to drive sustainable change. Together with partners, we co-host influential conferences, meetings, and learning sessions around the world to maintain the drumbeat on issues central to our mission, amplify country evidence and expertise, and inspire action.

Now more than ever, it is critical that visibility at all levels is maintained on SRHR and beyond. GI and partners will therefore pursue new and pioneering opportunities to facilitate country-informed knowledge exchange, disseminate data, research, key lessons and best practices, and ultimately foster advances in the science and practice of SRHR and related areas moving forward.

Equally, the Institute works to advance the translation of scholarship and research into practice through country-led advocacy and the documentation of the results of this work. We support influential country advocates who work hand-in-hand with governments and other decision-makers, driving targeted decisions and actions that will have a lasting impact. In the post-COVID-19 world, results-oriented advocacy will remain of critical importance to keeping SRHR on the agenda amidst competing priorities. GI will pursue opportunities to support sustainable local advocacy, with an emphasis on adapting, integrating, operationalizing, and scaling evidence-informed action, and measuring advocacy impact.

**Cultivate Leadership and Learning**

**We nurture new SRHR leaders – next generation researchers and advocates, and seasoned professionals alike – by augmenting their knowledge and skills to influence sustainable change.**

We recognize the critical value of local governments and organizations devising and implementing their own responses to health and development. Excellence in research, advocacy, and public health practice must reside at the local level. In alignment with this principle, the Gates Institute has a long history of inclusive and collaborative initiatives that serve to grow and nurture leadership and learning at organizational and individual levels.

Over the next five years, GI will continue to play an instrumental role in developing and nurturing a pipeline of talent, fostering centers of excellence, and cultivating leadership on SRHR, from the platform of Johns Hopkins University and around the globe. We will prioritize strengthening leadership throughout our work – within the Gates Institute, local partnerships, and south-to-south networks. This will include increasing investment in local champions and researchers, as well as building individual and institutional capacity to engage multidisciplinary cohorts of SRHR professionals from around the world in research, advocacy and programmatic activities, ensuring that in-country work is owned at the local level.
Organizational Commitments

The manner in which we do our work is equally as important as what we do to achieve the outcomes and long-term impact we envision. Therefore, we have shaped three Organizational Commitments that will underscore our Strategic Priorities over the next five years. While these principles are hallmarks of our work to date, we are now making a deeper and more transparent commitment to bringing them to the forefront of all of our work going ahead, and considering them at every step, from the outset of new ideas to implementation and action.

Catalyze Country-Owned, Locally Led Solutions

Gates Institute works with local partners to develop and scale innovative solutions that are identified, driven, and owned by country stakeholders and have sustainable impact.

Our research and experience tell us that while local ownership of health and development agendas (informed by active participation of stakeholders) may run contrary to the traditional development model, it is more effective in identifying bottlenecks, priorities, and solutions that are grounded in political and fiscal realities of the country. It is also grounded in the principles of achieving sustainable impact at scale at the institutional and community levels. Thus, a “country-owned, locally led” approach has emerged as a core element in GI's work. Most of our work is implemented through local partners, but even where we are engaged in direct technical assistance, country partners are in the driver’s seat.

Over the next five years, GI will take bold, intentional strides toward institutionalizing this approach to ensure that local stakeholders actively shape our full portfolio of work. Key steps may include expanding GI staff diversity, including representation from the countries we serve; ensuring that materials and meetings are appropriately translated/interpreted, especially for our Francophone partners, to ensure maximum engagement; increasing investment in local champions and researchers; and ensuring all project work done in-country is owned at the local level.
**Foster Equitable Partnerships**

With local partners in the lead, our partner-centered approach drives sustainable outcomes and solutions.

Our work has always been conducted through a partnership model, delivered through innovative technical support, training, and continuous learning with partners around the world who lead on implementation and champion country-driven responses. Our success therefore hinges on our ability to create and support strong country-driven responses with local, in-country organizations and individuals committed to SRHR work.

In this next phase of work, we will evolve our partnership model. At all levels we will increase equity, transparency, and inclusive decision-making. We will continue to engage with non-traditional partners and diverse donors, in support of country-based work and leadership.

**Maximize Collective Impact**

A nexus of science, advocacy, and programmatic work, the Gates Institute strategically leverages evidence and key learnings across this continuum to amplify our impact.

The power of Gates Institute lies within its umbrella structure, which provides a unique platform for diverse initiatives and collective knowledge that multiplies the impact of our work.

Leveraging this synergy is a priority area in the next five years. We will invest in a "One Gates Institute" approach, through which we will be more intentional about collaboration across the Institute and beyond. This will include scaling up our efforts to facilitate cross-directional learning and action, and intensifying engagement and amplification of learnings across projects and focus countries, ultimately accelerating progress.
WHERE WE WORK