Economic Empowerment for AIDS-Orphaned Children in Uganda

International Center for Child Health & Asset Development
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Columbia University
This Bridges to the Future semiannual report covers events and activities in the first half of study year 2: September 2012 through February 2013. The report highlights the Child Development Account opening launch event on September 29, 2012; Columbia University School of Social Work Dean Jeanette Takamura’s visit to our study site; our professional development as a team; the mentorship program; plans for the remaining half of study year 2; the new Suubi+Adherence R01 study; and the now official home for all of our studies and projects: the International Center for Child Health & Asset Development (ICCHAD) at Columbia University.

Cover photo, top row, left to right: Rev. Fr. Joseph Kato Bakulu, Assistant Education Secretariat, Diocese of Masaka; Dr. Jeanette C. Takamura, Dean, Columbia University School of Social Work; Dr. Fred M. Ssewamala, Principal Investigator, Bridges to the Future; Abel Mwebembezi, Executive Director, Reach the Youth-Uganda; & school-children at Matale Parish, Diocese of Masaka, home of the first Suubi/SEED Projects in southern Uganda.
Bridges to the Future Economic Empowerment for AIDS-Orphaned Children in Uganda

Study Year 2  
Semiannual Report, September 2012 – February 2013

Main Funding Agency  
Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland, USA

Other Funding Support  
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Study Overview
The overall goal of the Bridges to the Future study is to evaluate an innovative family-based economic empowerment intervention for AIDS-orphaned and vulnerable children. The study tests monetary savings for secondary school education, microenterprise development for family income, and several family-level support programs, including mentorship, financial management workshops, and school-level activities aimed at protecting children from future risks. The study is now in its second year.

To the best of our knowledge, Bridges to the Future is the first large-scale randomized experimental study (situated in 48 public primary schools) testing the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of a child, youth, and family-focused economic empowerment intervention in a poor developing country. Therefore, the findings from the study will guide policy, programming, and practice in the child and youth development field.

Acknowledgements
The Principal Investigator, Dr. Fred Ssewamala, and the entire research team extend their thanks to Vilma Ilic, Program Manager, for drafting and formatting this report. Others who contributed to the content of the report are the Principal Investigator, Dr. Fred Ssewamala and In-Country Project Coordinator, Jennifer Nattabi. The work contained in this report benefitted from the support of Leyla Karimli, Prascovia Nabunya, Julia Wang, the Catholic Diocese of Masaka, Reach the Youth-Uganda, the Dean of Columbia University School of Social Work, Dr. Jeanette C. Takamura, and the entire research team in Uganda. Our thanks also go to our funders: the National Institute of Child Health & Human Development, and Barbara and Marc Arnold, plus all of our supporters and affiliates in Uganda and in the United States. We are grateful to the teaching and administrative staff at each of the 48 Bridges schools; and the participating children and their caregiving families, who are the reason we do this work.

The content of this report is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.
On September 29, 2012, the Bridges to the Future Child Development Account opening launch event took place at Kimaanya Parish in Masaka Town, Uganda. Kimaanya Parish is within the Diocese of Masaka – our long-time community partner with whom we continue to strengthen our productive, collaborative relationship and whose Bishop graced our launch event. In the early morning hours, school children began arriving in droves, and many remained until late in the evening – taking part in the celebrations with their peers, teachers, and family members. The event was celebratory, but also reflective. Several graduates from Dr. Ssewamala’s previous Suubi Projects (SEED, 2004; Suubi-Uganda, 2005-2007; & Suubi-Maka, 2008-2012), some of whom are now university students, while others are practicing professionals (e.g., teachers), were in attendance and gave inspiring speeches. Recounting their younger days as participants, they described all that they were able to achieve through the assets they accumulated over the years, and the lessons they implemented from Suubi’s mentorship program and financial education. Dreams of becoming doctors, teachers, engineers, lawyers, and religious leaders are common among these former participants – who, for the majority of their childhood, had no hopes for their future and could not imagine entering major renowned universities in Uganda. These young adults offered valuable lessons for the incoming class of “Suubi” children who will hopefully build bridges to their own futures using the tools and knowledge the project aims to give them.

Over 1,200 families (including participating children and their caregiving families) from 20 selected Bridges primary schools (out of a total of 48 schools enrolled in the study) were in attendance. Several school drama groups prepared special presentations for the audience, with traditional dances and songs. Other invited guests included key political leaders such as the Vice President of the Republic of Uganda, Hon. Edward Ssekandi (represented by the Minister for Primary Education), District Chairpersons (equivalent to Governors in the U.S. system), Local Council Representatives and District Education Officers from all four study districts where the Bridges to the Future study is being implemented (Rakai, Masaka, Lwengo, and Kalungu). Dozens of Dr. Ssewamala’s colleagues, friends, and long-time community collaborators attended the event, as well as administrators and teachers at schools from the current and past projects. The Dean of Columbia University School of Social Work, Jeanette C. Takamura, who was visiting Dr. Ssewamala’s study site in Uganda – gave her own inspiring speech as an honorary guest at the event. Bank officials from our partner financial institutions were busily opening child savings accounts with participants and their parents/guardians. In total, over 1,500 guests commemorated Bridges to the Future and the launch of the matched savings program.
Right: Kiganda Dance
Bwanda Primary School, one of the 48 selected Bridges Schools, entertained guests with traditional dance and song at the launch event.

Left: Participating Bridges child and grandmother opened an account with Kakuuto Microfinance Institution at the launch event on September 29th, 2012 in Masaka.

From left to right: In-Country Project Coordinator, Jennifer Nattabi; Principal Investigator, Dr. Fred Ssewamala; Dean of Columbia University School of Social Work, Dr. Jeanette C. Takamura; research team member, Irene Nakibuka; Bishop, Diocese of Masaka, Rt. Rev. John Baptist Kaggwa; research team member, Evah Mwangi; Minister for Primary Education; research team member Milly Kawemba; Local Council Chairman for Masaka District; Executive Director of Reach the Youth-Uganda, Abel Mwebembezi.
Savings accounts opened at the launch event
Collaborating banks officials together with research staff visited schools and held informational sessions with participating children and their caregivers prior to the official savings account opening launch event on September 29th. At these sessions, banks officials and research staff briefed participants and their adult caregivers about the Child Development Accounts (CDAs) component of the intervention and the matching process. The study has partnered with three financial institutions: Diamond Trust Bank, Centenary Rural Development Bank, and Kakuuto Microfinance – which are spread throughout the entire study region – covering Greater Masaka and Rakai District. This geographical reach ensures that most participating children and their families can easily access their accounts without incurring excessive transport costs when utilizing bank services, including making deposits.

Total Child Development Accounts (CDAs) opened from September 2012 – February 2013

Table 1. Total CDAs opened at end of reporting period by financial institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Institution</th>
<th>Diamond Trust Bank</th>
<th>Centenary Bank</th>
<th>Kakuuto Microfinance</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>786</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Total CDAs opened at end of reporting period by district and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Greater Masaka Region</th>
<th>Rakai District</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>District Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Textbook distribution

In addition to opening child development accounts during the reporting period, over two-thousand new textbooks were distributed to the participating children enrolled in the 48 selected Bridges to the Future schools. The textbooks cover four subjects for primary levels five and six (equivalent to 6th and 7th grade in the U.S. system). The number of textbooks distributed to each school varies according to the number of participating Bridges children at a particular school.

PI, Dr. Ssewamala (center) with children, teachers, and research team members rejoicing during textbook distribution at Kasambya Primary School in Rakai District.

Media coverage and publicity

Thick layers of media representation from print, network news, and broadcast radio made it nearly impossible to shake hands with the honorary guests at our launch, but the extensive coverage prior to, during, and well after the event showed the fruits of their labor. The list below provides a smattering of the extensive media coverage:

1. September 26: Interview with Dr. Fred Ssewamala, 9pm Evening News on Uganda’s NTV Business Desk
2. September 27, New Vision: A brighter future for 1000 orphaned children
3. September 28, Columbia University School of Social Work website: Dr. Fred Ssewamala Offers Fresh Source of Hope to AIDS Orphans in His Native Uganda
4. September 30, The Observer: Masaka orphans to benefit from US project
5. October 1, Daily Monitor: 1,000 Masaka pupils open bank accounts in campaign to promote saving culture
6. October 14, New Vision: Ugandan professor restores hope for orphans
7. The Spectrum Newsletter, Columbia University’s School of Social Work very own publication dedicated a two-page spread to the event in the Spring 2013 issue.
TWO | PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Principal Investigator continues to have ongoing daily communication with the research team based at the Uganda field offices, as well as the Columbia University offices. Within this period, the PI made two, month-long trips to the study site in Uganda to monitor study implementation activities. When the PI is not at the study site, he is in constant communication with the In-Country Project Coordinator and the entire research team via phone, email, and Skype.

In addition, the PI conducts periodic trainings with the research team based in Uganda to identify risk factors associated with adverse events. These trainings include reviewing possible scenarios and formulating key questions used to assess risk, as well as training and practice concerning how to handle adverse events.

The research team continues to grow: 12 research assistants, our in-country collaborators, Reach the Youth-Uganda and the Diocese of Masaka comprise the team based in Uganda; and Columbia University Research Associates, Vilma Ilic and Leyla Karimli are also part of the research team – all of whom are supervised by the PI. The entire team continues to receive ongoing training regarding recruitment strategies, interviewing, tracking, human subjects protection, managing distress during interviews, providing referrals, and entering data.

Several weeks after the launch event, the research team in Uganda and the Columbia University-based team, along with our in-country collaborators, came together and engaged in a professional development retreat in Fort Portal, Uganda. Fort Portal is a 10-hour drive from our study site, located in the western part of country, known for its Rwenzori Mountains and national parks. Being in a new and different environment together allowed us to think about our work from a refreshed perspective, thereby creating a setting for skill-building, professional development, and team-strengthening activities. Under the direct supervision of the PI, Research Associate Vilma Ilic designed the retreat program. The program incorporated a variety of activities, catering to as many learning styles as possible. Building our team’s unity was the best part of the retreat. It was a much-needed pause in the trajectory of our projects – allowing us to reflect on our accomplishments and hone our skills for the upcoming activities.

SWOT Analysis during our retreat in Fort Portal.

Breakout activity during our retreat in Fort Portal.
THREE | THE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

From the beginning of October to mid-December 2012, the research team in Uganda was diligently preparing for the mentorship program. The mentorship program is one of three intervention components. The other two components are the matched Child Development Accounts (CDAs) and microenterprise development training.

The mentorship program is guided by a comprehensive curriculum developed by the PI, research staff, and graduate student interns over the past nine years (since 2004) – with lessons from the SEED, Suubi-Uganda, and Suubi-Maka studies. The curriculum has been periodically revised to incorporate suggestions from participants and mentors. For the Bridges study, the mentorship curriculum is comprised of nine sessions, each covering distinct topics. While the sessions do not necessarily build upon one another, trust and rapport do, so participants are encouraged to attend all nine sessions in succession. Participants in the treatment conditions have the opportunity to participate in one session per month, over the course of nine months. Participants are placed into small groups with no more than seven of their peers from school, and stay in the same group throughout the entire mentorship program. In order to build trust and rapport, the children have the same mentor for every session. Children meet with their mentor individually at least once a month or on as-needed basis during the intervention, providing an opportunity for the participant to ask questions and raise any concerns she/he has. Mentorship sessions cover topics such as education planning, setting goals, saving, and asset-building.

The mentors are near-peers to the participating children, meaning that they are current university students or have undergone an equivalent level of training. Several former Suubi Project participants serve as current mentors to Bridges children, and we feel this is a perfect match: Suubi graduates enrolled in university are now mentoring younger generations going through a similar program: Bridges to the Future. Who better to offer their wisdom and advice?

FOUR | COMMUNICATION

As is formulaic with international research, our team communications take shape via daily email correspondence, as well as online conference calls throughout the week. Every Monday morning we (numbering over 20) conference on Skype as an entire team from our various locales around the globe and discuss our work – the previous week’s updates, accomplishments, lessons, and our plans for the week to come. The power of online conferencing has served us well, and the research infrastructure Dr. Ssewamala has built in Uganda in a relatively short time is reflected with gratification every week, when our growing team in Uganda converges to conference with our team members based in more industrialized regions – where a broadband, high-speed Internet connection is viewed as a necessity rather than an amenity.
Semiannual Report

FIVE | PRESENTATIONS

Philippines & Indonesia
As the world learns more about youth financial inclusion and begins to see its potential impact on developing
country economies, as well as its health and developmental outcomes on the youth themselves, Dr. Ssewamala’s
presentation roster continues to grow. In December 2012, Dr. Ssewamala was in the Philippines and days later, in
Indonesia. In Manila, Philippines, he was an invited speaker for the CITI-Financial Times Financial Education Summit,
where he presented on the impact of his work with orphaned and vulnerable children in Uganda, including
highlighting the Bridges study. Days later, he spoke at the Monitoring & Evaluation Learning Series at the Center on
Child Protection at the University of Indonesia in Depok, Indonesia.

SSWR Conference
Bridges to the Future In-Country Project Coordinator, Ms. Jennifer Nattabi visited the United States for the month of
January 2013. It was Ms. Nattabi’s first time in the U.S., and the entire month was one of learning, training,
conferences, and professional development opportunities for her. At the 17th Annual Society for Social Work and
Research Conference in San Diego, Ms. Nattabi presented findings on Dr. Ssewamala’s Suubi-Maka study – the
study on which she started serving as field Project Coordinator. Jennifer’s presentation focused on the effects of the
Suubi-Maka (‘hope for families’) intervention on hopelessness and depression levels of the participating AIDS-
affected children in Uganda. Joining her, Program Manager, Vilma Ilic with doctoral student Julia Wang, also
presented another set of Suubi-Maka findings at the SSWR Conference in San Diego, focusing on the impact of the
Suubi-Maka economic empowerment intervention on mental health functioning of caregivers for the AIDS-affected
participating children.

Above: Project Coordinator Jennifer Nattabi and Program Manager Vilma Ilic present at the SSWR Conference in San Diego.
Cape Town, South Africa
Dr. Ssewamala and representatives from our community collaborating institutions in Uganda – the Diocese of Masaka and Reach the Youth, visited Cape Town, South Africa in early January. The founder and manufacturer of Wisepill is based in Cape Town, and Wisepill is one of the medication event monitoring systems we may use as the adherence measure for the newly-funded Suubi+Adherence study (see section 9). At the Wisepill headquarters in Cape Town, Dr. Ssewamala presented on the new Center and the Bridges to the Future study.

HIV Center, New York, NY
Dr. Ssewamala graced local audiences in early February in New York City as part of the Grand Rounds Series at the HIV Center for Behavioral and Clinical Studies at the New York State Psychiatric Institute and Columbia University (right). He gave the trajectory of his studies in Uganda, leading up to the Bridges study, and the audience was impressed and heartened by the effects his savings-led asset building work has had on the HIV/AIDS-impacted communities where we work.

UNAIDS & ILO, Geneva, Switzerland
February ended with two applauded presentations at the UNAIDS and International Labour Organization Headquarters. Dr. Ssewamala was invited to present his research and introduce Bridges to the UNAIDS and ILO Social Protection Series in Geneva, Switzerland.

Professional presentations during the reporting period highlighting Bridges to the Future and other studies:


3. **January 6-7**: Presented research, including Bridges to the Future, at Wisepill Headquarters, Cape Town, South Africa.


6. **February 7**: The Impact of Economic Empowerment Interventions on Health and Educational Outcomes of Adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa. Invited presentation at the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies at the New York State Psychiatric Institute and Columbia University.


8. **February 28**: Livelihoods Responses and Care and Support for OVC: Where is the Evidence and Where are the Gaps? Presented at the International Labour Organization Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

**SIX | PUBLICATIONS**

It has been a prolific period for Dr. Ssewamala. Five manuscripts have been published during the reporting period, including analyses from his former Suubi-Uganda and Suubi-Maka studies. *AIDS Care, Children and Youth Services Review, Journal of Adolescent Health, International Journal of Child & Family Welfare,* and *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* are among the scholarly journals to receive Ssewamala’s and colleagues’ work in the past six months. In addition, five manuscripts are currently under review in *Social Service Review, Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, Development in Practice, Social Science and Medicine,* and *International Social Work*. These publications will add to the current number (over 25) of publications from the International Center for Child Health & Asset Development by Dr. Ssewamala and colleagues, focused on youth financial inclusion, its developmental impacts, and program-specific social protection measures for orphaned and vulnerable children and their families. Most of these publications present the first longitudinal findings on the impacts of child savings accounts on child and youth development.
Dean Jeanette C. Takamura

Dean of Columbia University School of Social Work, Dr. Jeanette C. Takamura visited our study site in Uganda – it was her first time in Uganda and her first trip to Africa.

The entire research team was happy to host her for several days – during which she visited selected Bridges schools, toured our field research offices, visited all of our partner financial institutions and met with bank officials, visited Matale Parish within the Diocese of Masaka – where Dr. Ssewamala’s first SEED project began in 2004, met with the Bishop of the Diocese, Rt. Rev. John Baptist Kaggwa, and presided over the launch event on September 29th.

Indeed, it was a rich and fruitful trip for our Dean, and we welcome her back to Uganda any time.
Professor Michael Sherraden

Back in New York, the “father” of asset theory, Michael Sherraden, Youngdahl Professor of Social Development and Director of the Center for Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis, spoke at Columbia University School of Social Work on January 24th. On invitation by Fred Ssewamala, and as part of Columbia Population Research Center’s Lecture Series, Professor Sherraden presented the early findings from the SEED for Oklahoma Kids experiment to a full and attentive audience. During Dr. Ssewamala’s time as a masters and doctoral student, he worked with Professor Sherraden at Washington University, and it was there that he developed some of his initial ideas about savings-led asset building programs, designed especially for poor and marginalized populations. As such, Professor Sherraden highlighted and commended Dr. Ssewamala’s innovative and ground-breaking research in linking asset-building interventions to health-related outcomes. Co-Investigators on the Bridges to the Future study, Drs. Jane Waldfogel and Irv Garfinkel were among the audience, as was Dean Takamura.
Several ongoing activities will carry-over into the second half of study year 2, March through August 2013, and new activities are scheduled to begin. The research team will continue monitoring CDAs and collect savings transactional statements from our partner financial institutions, then distribute them to participants and their caregivers. Mentorship will continue, as well as microenterprise development and financial management training.

The microenterprise development and financial management trainings offer the participating children and their families an opportunity to get their hands dirty, quite literally, with context-specific skills to start family businesses and begin earning money. Like the other intervention components, these trainings are integral in tying the entire program together: they facilitate family cohesion, they allow children and their caregivers to learn about and understand the financial/bank statements showing their own deposits plus the matched savings, and they learn concrete, context-specific skills through which they can become financially self-reliant.

The first term of the new academic year began in early February, so field research staff are busy roll-calling and collecting administrative data from schools, in addition to carrying-out the usual care components: paying for school uniforms and school lunch, and providing other scholastic materials to all Bridges participants. Also, professional development opportunities will abound during the coming months, as we gear-up for our 12-month follow-up assessment to begin in May/June 2013.
NINE | THE SUUBI+ADHERENCE STUDY

September 2012 was a very exciting month for us. Not only was the launch event a huge success, but the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development made official its grant award to Dr. Fred Ssewamala for his new R01 study. The study, Suubi+Adherence: Evaluating a Youth-Focused Economic Empowerment Approach to HIV Treatment, will examine the impact and cost of an innovative economic empowerment intervention for HIV-positive adolescents prescribed antiretroviral therapy (ART). Dr. Ssewamala’s successful economic empowerment model will be adapted for young people living with HIV and taking antiretroviral medication. For this study, we will work with 32 clinics spread throughout three political districts in southern Uganda. This region continues to be the worst HIV/AIDS-impacted part of the country, and prior to the national roll-out of prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT), a generation of children were perinatally infected and are now living with HIV. Notably, this is Dr. Ssewamala’s first study in Uganda that will reach both in- and out-of-school youth. And, to the best of our knowledge, it will be the first study to employ the use of advanced technology in measuring young participants’ adherence to their HIV treatment using the medication event monitoring system, which is considered one of the most reliable measures of medication adherence. In addition, a number of other measures will be assessed, including HIV/AIDS knowledge and acceptance of positive status, HIV medication adherence self-efficacy, savings and asset accumulation, financial stability, mental health functioning, and sexual risk-taking behavior. The study will last for five years. The innovative economic empowerment intervention is informed by Dr. Ssewamala’s ongoing Bridges study, and previous studies in the region, Suubi-Uganda and Suubi-Maka.

Joining Dr. Ssewamala on the research team, we have Co-Investigator:
- Dr. Claude Ann Mellins – Co-Director of the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies at the New York State Psychiatric Institute and Columbia University.

And Consultants:
- Dr. Godfrey Kigozi – Head of Research Studies at Rakai Health Science Program and Uganda Virus Research Institute, in Rakai and Entebbe, Uganda
- Dr. Torsten Neilands – Associate Professor at University of California San Francisco’s School of Medicine and Methods Core Director at the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies
- Dr. Mary McKay – Director of McSilver Institute of Poverty Policy & Research and Professor of Social Work at New York University.

Suubi+Adherence Study Snapshot

| N  | 736 |
| Clincs | 32 |
| Location | Southern Uganda |
| Districts | Three (Rakai, Masaka, & Lwengo Districts) |
| Conditions | Two: 1) Bolstered Standard of Care; 2) Suubi+Adherence |
| Measures | ART adherence using medication event monitoring system (MEMS) |
| Duration | Five years (baseline assessment, 12, 24, 36, 48-month follow-up assessments) |
| Criteria | Ages 11-16 years; HIV-positive and aware of status; prescribed ART; enrolled in care at one of 32 randomly selected clinics; living within a family; in- and out-of-school |
TEN | INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR CHILD HEALTH & ASSET DEVELOPMENT

For several years, Dr. Ssewamala, together with his research assistants and research associates, have been working to establish a center to house their expanding research – both the scope and volume of projects, as well as the dedicated team working to see the projects’ success. With an excited and congratulatory spirit, the International Center for Child Health & Asset Development (ICCHAD) became official on February 11, 2013 following approval from the Columbia University Provost’s Office. We are all very excited to develop the Center, and we welcome you to visit us on the 11th floor of the Columbia University School of Social Work. Stay tuned for the official ICCHAD launch!

From left to right: Research team members: Martin Mugumya, Evah Mwangi, Dorothy Babirye, & Betina Nabisere; Rev. Fr. Joseph Kato Bakulu; In-Country Project Coordinator, Jennifer Nattabi; PI, Fred Ssewamala (center); research team members: Zam Naggayi, Proscovia Nalule, Jane Namulindwa, & Milly Kawemba; & Bridges contact teacher John Ssentume.

Program Manager, Vilma Ilic

Data Manager, Leyla Karimli