UBS Optimus Foundation

Strategic Plan 2014 to 2019
Stories of Hope

Jhencelle’s story
9 years old, Teach For The Philippines – Philippines

I hope to reach my dreams

Jhencelle always feels happy when she’s with her family because they take care of her. But it makes her cry when her parents argue. She delights in saying she loves “all those who love me”. When Jhencelle grows up she hopes to be a dancer and to develop her talent. She loves color and says “I want things to be colorful!” Her favorite is blue “because it is the color of the sky”. Thanks to our donors, Jhencelle is getting a quality education through our ‘Teach for the Philippines’ program.

Ababalwe’s story
10 years old, Home-based care for kids with tuberculous meningitis, Cape Town, South Africa

I hope to be a teacher

Ababalwe is a fan of cricket and singing. Ababalwe suffers from tuberculous meningitis for which he must take life-saving medication. Thanks to a program supported by the UBS Optimus Foundation, not only are these medicines made available, but he can keep track of the pills he must take through a child-friendly system of story books and stickers. At school he is very good at mathematics. He says that he enjoys it because he passes his tests every time. When he grows up he hopes to be a teacher to give “other people knowledge”. His favorite color is red “because it is colorful”.

Ada’s story
9 years old, Educating kids at home – Cajamarca, Peru

I hope to be a teacher

Ada is 9 years old and is never happier than when she is playing, jumping and dancing. “It’s nice and fun!” She loves her brothers, family and friends “because they love me and I love them back!” At school she enjoys studying math “because we learn about numbers” and eventually Ada hopes to become a teacher. She says she hates it “when someone does something wrong and I’m blamed for it.” But she is soon cheered up by cooking, cycling and hugging her teddy bears. And her favorite color is orange because “it is nice and girly”. The UBS Optimus Foundation is funding a program in Ada’s community that provides home-based early childhood care which is proven to not only keep kids in school, but also to enhance their academic performance.
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Executive Summary

In 2013, the Optimus Foundation launched a comprehensive research and analysis effort to inform and refine its philanthropic strategy. Determined to seek the smartest and most effective approaches to improve child protection, health and education, we conducted a careful and thorough assessment of the environment in which we operate to develop this five-year strategy.

A defined strategy is essential to ensure that the Foundation’s trajectory maximizes its comparative advantages and strengths, while remaining faithful to its mission. This Strategic Plan builds on findings from a thorough Landscape Analysis that we conducted in 2012 to identify priority needs of children, and priority approaches for us to address those needs. Our strategic planning process in 2013 focused on the Foundation’s identity, priorities, strengths and limitations, critical issues and aspirations.

Based on our conclusions from this intense process, we determined to:

– continue to place the highest value on learning, assessment and evidence of what works;
– commit to building collaborative relationships with local community expertise which promote mutual learning;
– take an even more hands-on approach to grant-making with deep partner engagement; and
– narrow our geographic and programmatic focus in order to do these things most effectively.

The Optimus Foundation is dedicated to funding high-impact programs. This requires intimate familiarity with what is happening in the communities, countries and regions where those programs are implemented. Our financial and human resources are modest compared to the large problems that we seek to address. Thus, we must deploy our programmatic, operational, fundraising and communications’ resources wisely, with a disciplined focus.
In order to accomplish this, we have determined to organize our grantmaking into strategic portfolios. Each portfolio is a collection of related grants with a common over-arching goal. This approach allows us to seek greater synergies among grantees within each portfolio. Individual portfolio strategies will allow us to improve coordination among diverse efforts to fill knowledge gaps, break down barriers, test innovative ideas, and demonstrate what works in a sequenced and rational manner. The Foundation will launch this new grantmaking strategy with four programmatic portfolios:

1. **Safe Kids** will build evidence of what works, strengthen capacities and promote proven programs that protect children from violence and maltreatment. This portfolio includes our pioneering investments to improve global understanding of the scope and magnitude of the problem – vital evidence to improve policies and programs.

2. **Communities Caring for Kids** will prioritize community-based and action-oriented tools and health literacy programs for children and families. This portfolio recognizes that health solutions are most effective when evidence guides local communities to not only understand and embrace healthy behaviors, but also to take the lead in finding and sustaining their own solutions.

3. **Kids Fit for School** will address family and community motivations and attitudes that affect children’s enrollment, retention and achievement in school. This portfolio focuses on making school matter – on the demand side of the education equation.

4. **Schools Fit for Kids** will focus on the growing phenomenon of low cost private education and other local educational innovations in low- and middle-income countries. This portfolio supports the assessment and promotion of diverse school models that improve educational quality, emphasizing the needs of disadvantaged children in urban and peri-urban slums.

These four grant portfolios, and the new more focused scope of our grantmaking, are described in greater detail below. Over time, additional portfolios will be added, including **Early Childhood Development PLUS (ECD+)** and a **Rapid Response Emergency Fund**, in order to seize new opportunities to improve the lives of children.
UBS Optimus Foundation

Our Identity

The Optimus Foundation is guided by its vision, mission and values. During the strategic planning process, we refined these fundamental elements of our identity in order to clarify the Foundation’s role, unique perspective and priorities.

Our Vision

A world where all children reach their full potential

Our Mission

Ensuring children are safe, healthy, educated – and ready for their future

Our Core Values

– Compassion: We focus on the most vulnerable children and work closely with their communities to affect lasting change
– Excellence: We strive for the highest quality, supporting and validating practical solutions
– Stewardship: We steward effectively the resources entrusted to us
Guided by these fundamental elements of our identity, we evaluated our current role and aspirations in the global development landscape to derive our value proposition. This value proposition is the explanation of what we do to achieve our mission while remaining true to our core values. It is the very DNA of the organization, and will help us to align future programmatic decisions and resource allocations.

Our value proposition is informed by the following observations from our Landscape Analysis:

– there are many poor, sick and vulnerable children in the world, and their suffering can be, and must be, prevented, ameliorated or eliminated to avert lifelong harm;
– numerous programs focus on children, but these efforts are fragmented, not comprehensive in addressing children’s needs, and we often don’t know for sure if they work; and,
– there are not enough resources to address all the needs of the most vulnerable children, and even when money is available it is not always invested wisely.

Mindful of these observations, we developed our value proposition:

Children are our future. We invest in child safety, health and education because these three factors are crucial for a child’s well-being and future life success.

We fund pragmatic solutions supported by solid scientific research. We favor integrated approaches, which combine safety, health and education, because these have the greatest lasting impact.

Through our special relationship with UBS, we seek to increase financial support to address the needs of vulnerable children, and to help our donors to be effective.

Measurable and lasting change for children
There are several additional elements of “our DNA” that differentiate the Optimus Foundation and require clarification. Based on our historical experience, and our recent landscaping and strategic planning analyses, the Foundation places a high value on linking evidence and practice, and on integrated solutions. We believe firmly that foundations must be nimble and take smart risks. And we know we can’t go it alone. Working with partners, including other foundations, will be a high priority over the next five years.

Evidence and Practice

Not all international development efforts are based on solid evidence, and not all research seeks to generate evidence that practitioners need. Researchers, practitioners and community members all speak different languages. To ensure that children are safe, healthy, educated and ready for their future, we must build trusting collaborations and exchanges among these different stakeholders. Through our commitment to an Evidence and Practice Approach, we seek to support a virtuous cycle in which research generates evidence to inform policies and improve implementation, while real-world context and activities inform and set the priorities for relevant research.

Integrated Solutions

Our priorities are child protection, health and education. But pursuing any one of these priorities in isolation is often less effective than a combined approach. For example, the Foundation is working to integrate violence prevention with Early Childhood Development to create a whole new field: “ECD+.” And we know that strong synergies arise from interventions that combine health literacy, hygiene, nutrition and education. Through our commitment to Integrated Solutions, we place renewed emphasis on support for multi-sectoral approaches to improve children’s well-being.

Taking Smart Risks

The Optimus Foundation believes firmly that foundations – more than any other social sector actors – should take informed and intelligent risks. We recognize that:

- non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are on the front lines, serving families and communities, but often lack the resources and bandwidth to experiment;
- governments have the deepest pockets, and are responsible to deliver social goods and services to their citizens, but they often have a low tolerance for risk-taking; and
- individual donors are numerous and generous, but often want a ”sure thing” and immediate results from their charitable donations.

Over the next five years, we will continue to support the testing of new approaches, and the adaptation of proven tools and models to new cultural contexts and geographic settings. As we have done in the past, we will test such innovations with smaller grants, engaging actively with these grantees to mitigate risk, continuously assess, and course-correct when needed. Such grants may include capacity strengthening in the nascent field of child protection, testing novel approaches to nutrition, water, sanitation & hygiene, health literacy, motivating communities for education, and early childhood development (ECD). Through our commitment to Taking Smart Risks, we remain comfortable in our role as the first institutional funder for promising new organizations, and new solutions that are developed by proven teams, based on sound evidence, and accompanied by engaged grants’ management.
**Working with Partners**

While the Optimus Foundation is willing to be the first institutional funder for new initiatives, we will also frequently partner with governments, the private sector, and other funders, including the largest global foundations that focus on children’s well-being. Our own grantees are also partners who are helping us to achieve our mission. Through our commitment to *Working with Partners*, we will deepen our engagement with our own grantees, and strengthen our collaboration with other funders.

These partnerships can operate in a number of ways, including:

- providing the evidence a government needs to scale up and sustain effective programs;
- strengthening capacities, providing access to networks and strategic guidance to fledgling and riskier programs, adding value beyond traditional grantmaking;
- cooperation as equals with co-funding partners of comparable size, or in support roles (e.g., supporting monitoring & evaluation of a partner’s program) with larger funders;
- leaving behind a legacy of materials and tools which can be adapted to local contexts;
- engaging the private sector to implement market-based solutions to solve problems; and
- contributing our own technical expertise, and sometimes support for capacity strengthening, in multi-partner programs that involve large global funders, even when the lead global co-funder manages the overall program (e.g., the program and lead partner benefits from the Foundation’s expertise in ECD+, health literacy, or nutrition).

As a key part of our grantmaking strategy involves engaging with the communities in which we work, our interaction with them is essential for long term programmatic success. Depending on the maturity of a program and nature of the partners, the Foundation may play a range of roles designed to give, get and respond to feedback from beneficiaries, implementing organizations and the communities we seek to serve. We will build this feedback loop into our evaluations which are not only designed to assess the extent to which the program has been impactful, but also to address the needs of the communities in which the program is implemented, listening and advising on how to enhance and sustain the benefit. We strive to learn from and build capacity in the communities in which we work. Only with this approach to mutual learning will we become more effective and affect lasting change.

*While the Optimus Foundation is willing to be the first institutional funder for new initiatives, we will also frequently partner with governments and other funders.*
The Foundation has always worked to support programs with the greatest potential to improve children's lives. During our first decade, the result of this effort was a collection of excellent but largely unrelated grants. In 2009, we adopted a more strategic “value chain” approach. The Foundation supported small “Innovation Phase” proof-of-concept grants, graduating the most promising of these to larger “Core Phase” grants for validation. Finally, we supported a small number of “Program Phase” grants to adapt, replicate and enable scaling of successful interventions in new countries or contexts.

This grantmaking approach worked well, but for our new five-year strategy we challenged ourselves to be more strategic still. Our goal was to develop a grantmaking approach that would maximize the impact of the resources entrusted to us. We determined that this would require greater coordination, synergies and depth of engagement with the programs that we support. To achieve these goals, we have chosen to adopt a portfolio-based approach to our grantmaking.

Each portfolio is a bundle of related grants, small (and at times riskier) and large, with a common over-arching goal. Within each portfolio, the Foundation will support distinct but related programs designed to fill knowledge gaps, break down barriers, test innovative ideas and demonstrate what works in a sequenced and rational manner.

This portfolio strategy recognizes that many effective child protection and health interventions can be delivered in schools and preschool settings, that children learn better when they are healthy and well-nourished, that schools are not the only place where children learn, and that – beyond schools – families and communities must be informed, empowered and motivated to contribute to children’s safety, health and education.

Our portfolios currently include one primarily focused on child protection, one on health and two on education. Because of our commitment to integrated solutions, we will also explore linkages among portfolios, and add two additional ones which cut across all three areas – ECD+ and Rapid Response Emergency Fund. Over time we may add other portfolios to seize new opportunities.

Child Protection Portfolio

Our earlier Landscape Analysis highlighted the continuing worldwide crisis of child safety. Violence and maltreatment are often-ignored threats to child well-being that deserve and require special attention. Unfortunately, comprehensive and reliable data on the magnitude of the problem are lacking, and this is a major obstacle to developing effective prevention efforts.

However, the limited data that are available strongly support this focus area. Approximately 20% of women and 5–10% of men report being sexually abused as children. Physical abuse is reported by 25–50% of all children, and the perpetrator is often (though not always) another child. Child maltreatment and harsh parenting are widespread, and these behaviors are strongly linked to adverse health outcomes and behaviors later in life.

The landscaping and strategic planning exercises helped us to identify priority child protection needs, knowledge gaps and areas of under-investment by other foundations and government donors. Based on these findings, we have chosen to focus our violence prevention support on the broader context of child maltreatment. This focus area works to build proven effective programs, and to strengthen capacities and evidence in this nascent field.

Safe Kids

seeks to develop safe places for kids, free from violence and maltreatment. We will do this by building evidence of what works, strengthening capacities and promoting proven programs that protect children from violence and abuse. This portfolio includes our pioneering investments to improve global understanding of the scope and magnitude of the problem – vital evidence to improve policies and programs.
While prevention is relevant for all children, treatment and rehabilitation of the victims of sexual violence and abuse are only relevant to the 5% of cases that are reported. Prevention is more cost-effective, yet government spending to prevent violence, abuse and maltreatment represents less than 20% of all child protection funding. Sound evidence of the magnitude of the problem is limited, and we have little evidence on whether most child protection programs are effective.

This portfolio contains a coordinated collection of investments to develop and assess programs to prevent sexual violence and maltreatment of children. This includes programming focused in the classroom and communities. It also supports efforts to expand the evidence base, including the magnitude of the problem, to influence and improve national policies and support for effective child protection programs. This effort builds on the Foundation’s pioneering work in this field through the Optimus Study.

**Child Health Portfolio**

Our earlier Landscape Analysis highlighted the continuing health crisis for children around the world. Despite increased donor and country commitments to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, two numbers suffice to summarize the problem: nearly seven million children under the age of five still die every year from preventable causes, and three million newborn children never live to see beyond their first month of life.

The landscaping and strategic planning exercises helped us to identify priority health conditions, knowledge gaps and areas of under-investment by other foundations and government donors. Based on these findings, we have chosen to focus our child health support on addressing last mile gaps in public health, prioritizing health literacy and robust nutrition programs. We will pursue these objectives with our grant portfolio: Communities Caring for Kids.

Recent improvements in global child health indicators hide faltering progress – and setbacks – among the most marginalized children. To thrive, children and their mothers need to survive child-birth, remain free from infections, and receive adequate nutrition. Today, these essential needs are most threatened in the world’s growing urban slums, refugee camps, and remote and marginalized villages where health literacy – including knowledge of effective health-seeking behaviors – is limited.

This portfolio contains a coordinated collection of investments to improve health knowledge, encourage healthy behaviors, and strengthen local community capacities to take health into their own hands. It places a high priority on innovative educational tools, communications technologies to collect and deliver health information, affordable point-of-use diagnostics, and participatory learning and action methodologies. In addition, we will prioritize reducing the burden of undernutrition through our Nutrition for Growth partnership with the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Children’s Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF). This will be linked to a new innovative financing mechanism that will expand resources for evidence-based solutions in collaboration with other funders.

**Education Portfolios**

Our earlier Landscape Analysis highlighted the continuing education crisis for children around the world. The global development community’s strong commitment to “education for all” has helped build more schools and enroll more students, but 57 million primary school-aged children are still not in school. When it comes to enrollment, poverty and attitudes toward education are as important as access to schools. And simply building schools and making enrollment free is not the whole solution: increased enrollment has not translated into improved school achievement.
In poor communities, families still need their children to work in the field or family trade. School curricula based on old colonial models are often deemed irrelevant. Hidden costs, including books and uniforms, for “free” public schools create an unaffordable financial shock. Few developing countries have established national policies and programs for pre-primary education. Yet there is growing evidence that preschools bring high returns – if they provide nutrition and cognitive stimulation in the local language with games, songs and stories derived from local culture.

The landscaping and strategic planning exercises helped us to identify priority education needs, knowledge gaps and areas of under-investment by other foundations and government donors. Based on these findings, we have chosen to focus our education support on motivating families and communities to support education, and strengthening capacities for local educational innovation with a strong emphasis on the most marginalized students. We will pursue these objectives with two grant portfolios: Kids Fit for Schools and Schools Fit for Kids.

Poverty, malnutrition and poor health interfere with a child’s ability to learn. Children who lack Early Childhood Development (ECD) opportunities often enter primary school ill-prepared to learn. School curricula that do not reflect the reality of daily lives make schools seem abstract and irrelevant to parents. Communities who know from experience the low quality of existing school systems may lack enthusiasm for, and commitment to, their own children’s education.

This portfolio contains a coherent collection of investments focusing on the drivers of educational achievement including high-quality ECD programs to improve readiness for primary school; locally relevant school curricula to increase motivations for learning; and other programs to improve parent and community perceptions of the value of education in order to increase enrollment, retention, achievement and graduation rates.

Schools Fit for Kids

will focus on the growing phenomenon of “low cost private education” and other local educational innovations in low- and middle-income countries. This portfolio will focus on the “supply side” of the education equation. It will support the assessment and promotion of diverse school models that improve educational quality, emphasizing the needs of disadvantaged children in urban and peri-urban slums.

Low quality schools lead to low student achievement. At public schools in many low- and middle-income countries, teacher absenteeism reaches 25–40%. For example, only 35% of 5th graders in West African have achieved the “minimum level” in reading, and only 42.6% in math. In India, 50% of second graders cannot read a single word, 60% cannot read a simple paragraph, 40% cannot recognize numbers between one and nine, and 75% cannot perform simple math tasks such as division.

This portfolio contains a coordinated collection of investments to strengthen capacities, and assess and promote affordable high-quality school models including low cost private schools. The emphasis is on quality facilities, curricula and teaching materials; well trained teachers and school administrators; and effective school management systems. These efforts will focus on urban and peri-urban slums where the majority of excluded children live.
UBS Optimus Foundation

Age and Geographic Priorities

The Optimus Foundation has always supported programs that serve children during the most critical stages of their development in countries where threats to their full potential are most acute. To enhance our impact over the next five years, we have chosen to clarify and narrow our age and geographic priorities.

Age

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a “child” as a person up to the age of 18. Historically, the Foundation has followed this definition in supporting children’s needs. However, our recent Landscape Analysis highlighted increasingly strong evidence of the critical importance of interventions during early childhood. Therefore, our new strategy will prioritize programs that focus on the well-being of children under the age of eight. This will include support for healthy pregnancies, which are essential for child survival and later life success. Our child protection efforts will continue to focus on all children.

Geography

The Foundation has identified priority countries where we believe we can have the greatest positive impact on children’s lives. Our evaluation included analysis of key national indices for children’s vulnerability including poverty, immunization coverage, access to clean drinking water and primary school enrollment. We also considered the quality of our own networks, the efforts of other donors, and potential synergies with UBS’ largest offices. Finally, we assigned scores for ease-of-operating based on, for example, the existence of armed conflict, and local government attitudes toward engagement with non-profit organizations.

Given these needs, opportunities and constraints, the team derived a list of priority countries where we will focus our program portfolio strategies. We have highlighted the priority regions assigned to each portfolio in the separate Portfolio Strategies.

While the Foundation will maintain the flexibility to source and replicate programs in other countries and regions to accommodate clients’ interests or take advantage of unique opportunities, we will seek an in-depth understanding of the following countries and aim to fund many of our new grants in these geographies.

Geographic Priorities

1 Mexico
2 Peru
3 Brazil
4 Liberia
5 Sierra Leone
6 Ivory Coast
7 Ghana
8 South Africa
9 India
10 Nepal
11 Bangladesh
12 China
13 Philippines
14 Indonesia
15 UK
16 Switzerland
17 Germany
18 Hong Kong
19 USA
Financial institutions such as UBS have an important role to play in philanthropy. We are mindful of our special relationship with the bank, and of the value we can provide for all of our donors including the bank itself, clients and employees. We strive for excellence in our work not just to improve the lives of children, but also to live up to the trust these donors place in us.

Our professional staff experts often contribute insights, analysis and advice on highly effective philanthropy to private clients of the bank. And we are moved by the pride and enthusiasm of UBS staff when they learn about the Foundation’s work around the world. Over the coming five years, it will be increasingly important for the Optimus Foundation to articulate its value for donors beyond “just” ensuring a social return on their investments.

For example:

- we actively engage with our donors, giving them access to global programs that they would not otherwise have;
- we source innovative and unique programs, and conduct due diligence with a level of quality and rigor that few small family foundations can match;
- we engage with our grantees, providing oversight, auditing and outcomes management of programs, and organize external evaluations by world class experts, which many donors cannot do on their own;
- we provide periodic progress reports to our donors so that they can see results;
- we offer our donors ongoing learning opportunities to help them grow as philanthropists;
- we are here for the long-term, offering continuity and reliability; and
- we commit to donors that 100% of their funds go directly to benefit children; UBS covers all Optimus Foundation administrative costs.
Just as we hold our grantees accountable for measuring and meeting agreed upon milestones, we intend to hold ourselves accountable as well. Below is an illustrative example of how we plan to do this within three distinct categories, including outcomes for children, the sector, and operational and programmatic effectiveness.

Children’s Outcome
Measureable improvement in children’s lives
Indicative outputs:
– impact data on programs,
– number of lives improved,
– cost analysis of programs

Sector Outcome
Influence decision making, namely that integrated approaches for health, education and protection and use of high quality data, to improve programmatic decision making, becomes more widely accepted in the sector
Indicative output:
– increase in mentions of this approach in select journals,
– development of guidelines that are adopted,
– inclusion at key international meetings

Operational Outcome
Demonstrated value of Optimus to UBS clients
Indicative outputs:
– increase in number and value of donations,
– increase in repeat donations
– satisfaction of beneficiaries and communities in which we work

These are only a few of the outcomes and indicators we will measure to evaluate our effectiveness. In our annual planning process, we will set clear targets and goals for a number of other indicators as well to ensure we allocate resources appropriately and make necessary modifications as we learn.
The Optimus Foundation’s grantmaking investments are not derived from interest earned on a ten-figure endowment. Thus, we cannot improve children’s lives without our donors, from the employee who contributes 10 Swiss francs from his salary to the high net worth client who contributes a multi-million dollar gift from her personal fortune. We cannot bring direct benefits to the millions of children we hope to serve, or any children, without a solid plan to reach out to our donors.

To meet our ambitious programmatic goals, we are creating an “Optimus Network” of new offices and sister foundations in key UBS markets around the world. In May 2013, the Foundation opened an office in Hong Kong to reach out to potential donors in Asia. By the end of 2013, we will open the doors of the UBS Optimus Foundation UK. During 2013, we also strengthened our relationship with our sister foundation in Germany.

These offices and sister foundations will adopt the same strategic focus outlined here, and will expand our ability to reach out to staff and clients of UBS in key markets. This Network alone will not enable us to grow to improve the lives of millions more children. In order to do that, we hope to bring the bank even closer to its clients’ interests in philanthropy, perhaps even co-funding programs with them directly.

This Strategic Plan

2014 – 2019 is a programmatic strategy. Our full fundraising strategy is addressed separately, along with the communications strategy that is required to support that effort. However, since fundraising is an essential ingredient to our programmatic strategy, it is important to explain a key part of the concerted effort that the Foundation is making – with generous support from UBS – to expand our outreach to UBS clients and staff.
Above all, this strategy was developed because we believe that hope is a priceless commodity. Children hope to be safe and free from fear. They hope for good health so they can play and grow. If they hope to go to school, it is because they hope to learn for a more promising future. Hope is a beacon on the road of every child’s life.

All children should have the opportunity to reach their full potential. We commit to work with our partners, donors and supporters to build strong effective programs that improve the lives of children. We hope more children grow up with a brighter future because of this work.

This strategy is one step on the road. Join us!

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