

Personal photo by Leah McManus



## ***One Nongovernmental Organization's Experience with the Millennium Development Goals***

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While I was a graduate student in international studies, I got an internship with a Raleigh-based international NGO, Curamericas, that would take me to Liberia and ultimately, start me on my career. Curamericas' work revolves around building the capacity of local institutions, both private and public, to ensure that persons residing within their borders have increased accessibility, affordability, and availability to basic primary health care services and these services are equitably provided. The organization seeks to bridge the gap between the community and health facilities by empowering people to take responsibility for their own health outcomes and by training local institutions on effective and efficient means of locally based outreach. This capacity building allows for an increased quality of life for the population within a country's borders.

Curamericas has contributed to meeting several of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): reducing child mortality and improving maternal health in Guatemala and Liberia, and combating HIV/AIDS in Haiti and Liberia. The emphasis is on building the capacity of local institutions to implement local services that prevent and treat child mortality, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Critical indicators of success include overall statistics, such as child mortality rates, systemic policy changes—such as local NGOs implementing malaria prevention programs based on best practices, and behavioral changes, such as a pregnant woman attending all of her checks during pregnancy.

Successful projects are imperative to countries like Liberia. Not only does the country see unnecessary suffering that can and should be relieved, but a healthier Liberia means rapid development. Rapid development (which can include education and economic growth) in turn usually leads to a more stable and less corrupt nation, allowing for the democratic process to take place in more than just theory, all of which allows for quality of life to improve. The health and stability of Liberia affects West Africa in that if a conflict arises in Liberia, it is the neighbors of Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone that will bear the economic burden of caring for the displaced persons. You could also say it affects the world.

I was able to turn my internship into a 3 year Program Associate position working in Liberia, Haiti, Kenya and Sierra Leone. I built on those experiences and now work for another NGO, IntraHealth International, as a Program Officer for the Capacity Plus Project, a USAID funded project that focuses on building capacity in the global health force. To help those abroad climb out of extreme poverty everyone should become educated on various programs/organizations that work to alleviate poverty. I encourage you to participate. Be an intern or volunteer; become educated about various organizations doing such work in your area, inform your friends, or even donate money or goods in kind. You can be of great support to those who are working every day to chip away at not only alleviating poverty but providing sustainable solutions for the future. And you never know where it might lead you!