

Title: Sport for Health Development and Social Change in South Africa

School: Northwestern University

Student(s) Information:

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Project Summary: *Describe location, timeframe, participants, other funding involved, scope of work, and goals intended.*

We spent the duration of the summer travelling in and around South Africa, where we worked closely with various development organizations that use sports (specifically soccer) to engage young people around health issues (especially HIV). We found this exciting new movement, called "development through sport" by those at the forefront of it, a refreshing reversal from the stifling models we had encountered in previous experiences. Soccer, especially in South Africa, is an exceptionally powerful cultural outlet, and we found that a network of organizations are harnessing this power to create more innovative, interactive and culturally sensitive models for global health and development. As female athletes ourselves, and considering that HIV adversely affects women across the African continent, we are especially interested in how girls and women fit into the "development through sport" movement. As we decided to use video to investigate how this movement is playing out on the ground, the project will culminate in the production of a short film documenting our findings.

The fieldwork for this project spanned 12 weeks, from mid-June to mid-September, though considering initial groundwork and post-production, the project will likely span 12 months total. As the project is filmic and research-oriented, "participants" include mostly interviewees and other contacts, specifically staff and clients of sport-oriented development organizations with whom we have worked closely.

The goal, ultimately, is to project our findings via film to a larger audience of Global Health students and young professionals. We have partnered with two organizations to promote and distribute the film: The Global Medical Relief Program (GlobeMed), a not-for-profit organization for students dedicated to ending disparities in the global health sector, and the Northwestern University Global Health Alumni Club, a internet-based professional network for Northwestern Global Health undergraduates and alumni. The film will be featured at the GlobeMed Annual Summit in Spring 2008 and will be broadcasted via a specialized internet website, in partnership with GlobeMed. We are extremely grateful for the support of The Kathryn Wasserman Davis Foundation, and The Lucius and Eva Eastman Fund, who awarded an additional \$5,000 toward the project.

Project Results: *Self-evaluate the project; your assessment should enumerate what goals were and were not accomplished.*

We certainly accomplished our initial goal, which was to investigate how soccer is used as a tool for development and global health outreach, specifically in regard to how females are involved. We did change the scope of our project to focus solely on South Africa (as opposed to sub-Saharan Africa), though the "development through sport" movement spans across the African continent, and the world more largely.

We encountered several organizations in South Africa that use soccer (among other sports) for health promotion, HIV education, one-on-one social counselling, juvenile prison outreach, and other development work. The most notable were Grassroot Soccer (GRS), Sports for Life (SFL) and Ambassadors in Sport (AIS), all of which conduct a variety of soccer-based educational and health promotional programs in disadvantaged communities. Several key themes emerged. One thread is the power of soccer to transcend cultural, social, racial and economic barriers: "soccer is

a common language” we heard quite often. Danielle, the HIV/AIDS Coordinator at AIS, spoke of her work developing a young women’s soccer club at a refuge center outside Cape Town:

“It didn’t matter what language we spoke or that we came from different backgrounds, but immediately we could bond over a ball and a field, and be at the same level.”

Soccer is a vehicle for relationship-building. In this case, after playing soccer together it was easier for the girls to open up and discuss sensitive issues like sex, rape, and HIV. GRS promotes a more structured educational approach, using a carefully designed curriculum that incorporates high-energy soccer-oriented games injected with important messages about HIV. As the curriculum is highly interactive, discussion-heavy and discovery-based, the adolescents learn in a way that they don’t even know that they’re learning. This is quite a different experience than the bland, fact-sputtering delivery that characterizes the South African approach to sexual education. GRS has worked with hundreds of African schools to incorporate its curriculum into both physical education and afterschool programs, by training locals to deliver the curriculum and serve as role models for youth in the community.

Integrating the GRS curriculum into the South African education system enables regular and reliable access to the local youth population, and allows GRS to target an equal number of males and females. The plan is to train locals, and ultimately South African teachers to deliver the engaging HIV curriculum, and, as teachers are paid by the government, the program will be on its way to being completely African-run. “By Africans, for Africans” is the ultimate goal, empowering locals to take on the organizational responsibility, and the struggle to combat HIV in their respective communities.

Soccer is, by no means, the only answer to tackling the HIV epidemic in South Africa. We also encountered programs that used other sports to engage young people around HIV and other health issues. One impressive organization, Hoops for Hope (H4H), uses basketball to target youth. H4H recently developed a special initiative to target girls using netball, the local sport of preference among South African females. We found other programs and organizations using drama, music, dance and other performance similarly impressive in facilitating interactive and creative learning around HIV issues for young people.

As soccer is undoubtedly the most popular sport in the world, it is quite easy to get stakeholders involved. A wide variety of funders are willing to invest in soccer-oriented development. Schools, parents, and other community members are likely to give their support. On the political side of things, especially in African countries, leaders are more inclined to give their support to an HIV initiative, if it involves soccer.

Implications: *What are the project's implications for peace? What are the future prospects for the project? What have you learned?*

Soccer is indeed a common language, spoken in virtually every corner of the world. The power it holds to transcend barriers makes it an ideal tool for sustainable and effective development work, especially across the African continent.

As previously mentioned, we will, in partnership with GlobeMed, promote and distribute the film to students and professionals interested and invested in Global Health and development. We hope that our findings, projected on screen, will shed light on what we find as an engaging, innovative, culturally sensitive and exciting movement in the Global Health domain. We hope to inspire young Global Health students and professionals to consider alternative and creative approaches to development work. What we’ve learned over the past three months is incomparable to anything that could have been accomplished in the classroom. We are incredibly grateful for this unique and unforgettable learning experience.

