

**Veneka Chagwedera**

**Final report**

**Liman Fellowship 2009**

As a Liman Summer Fellow, I worked at the Rockefeller Foundation, a private foundation that works to improve the lives of disadvantaged people globally. The mission of the Rockefeller Foundation is to ensure that the opportunities created in a newly globalized world are accessible to more people, more fully, in more places — and that poor and vulnerable populations around the world have access to such benefits, the knowledge base to sustain it. Through its many initiatives, the Rockefeller Foundation is engaged in grant making work across and between disciplines, bridging the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

At the Rockefeller Foundation, I worked a policy related initiative in public health – Transforming Health Systems (THS), which is assisting low-income countries in addressing the fundamental challenges of their health systems in developing countries. While health spending has increased dramatically around the world, access to affordable, quality services has not, particularly in the developing world. The Foundation’s work helps low income countries remove barriers to effective, efficient health systems, thereby opening new avenues to bring cures to the places and communities where they will make the greatest difference. This recently launched initiative largely works on case studies in Ghana, Rwanda, and Vietnam, and also supports select activities at the regional and global level.

Over the summer I began a research paper scanning the landscape of legislation regarding universal health coverage in developing countries. This legal research work will be used by the foundation and its network of grantees in South Asia and Africa to inform a framework for health care reform. Throughout the summer, I was engaged in several smaller projects, including independent research on how nongovernmental organizations in our network were carrying out their work to advance health as a human right and how this work could be leveraged to become more effective.

One of the most memorable moments for me was witnessing the many ways that law takes shape through policy efforts. This stood out to me most because I had previously envisioned that public interest law revolved mainly around legal practice. Through my work at the Rockefeller Foundation, however, it has become

clear to me how important policy work is in ensuring that the needs of the disadvantaged are met. I watched as key landmarks were achieved, including Kofi Annan's groundbreaking speech that stressed the importance of health care at an affordable cost for all in developing countries. Knowing that I was contributing to such efforts was inspiring and has made me ever more committed to working for the public good.

This fellowship has been an amazing opportunity and it is one of the best programs I have had the opportunity to participate in during my time at Princeton University. If I were to add any comments or suggestions, it would be with regard to allowing students to subsidize their summer stipend should it be insufficient to cover living expenses. Although the stipend is very generous; it does not cover expenses for all students who are living in metropolitan cities such as New York. Under the current system, students are not able to engage in any other part-time jobs to gain extra funds for housing and food expenses. They are also restricted from applying for additional scholarships. Such a system works strongly against those students whose parents or relatives may not be able to provide them with extra money over the summer to cover their basic expenses. In light of this, it would be most helpful to modify the regulations and allow students with demonstrated financial need to subsidize their stipend, or take on other part time work as necessary to cover their basic living expenses for the 8-10 weeks. As long as such work does not impact their fellowship responsibilities, it would be a great way to help low-income students cover living expenses over the summer and not incur debt.

I am most grateful to have been afforded this opportunity to participate in the Liman Fellowship Program. This has been a wonderful way to become involved and engaged in public service at an early point in my career. I have been inspired to continue my dream of serving the public and working for the least advantaged members of our community. I will continue to be involved in international non-profit work and am considering law school and post graduate studies.