

Grants restored: Nancy Mock's work provides optimism during turbulent time

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Dr. Nancy Mock (right), pictured with her son Alex Papal in Nepal, is continuing the work of ensuring international communities can become more self-sufficient.

The current shifting nature of federal funding has been felt entirely too keenly among researchers in the scientific community, but within the landscape of cancellations, reductions, reworkings, and uncertainty, some small pockets of good news have emerged.

[Dr. Nancy Mock](#), an associate professor in the [Department of International Health and Sustainable Development](#), had two separate USAID grants get canceled earlier in the year. Both, however, have since been reinstated and approved for next year congressionally.

Mock's reinstated program Empowering Marginalized Groups through Economic Graduation or EMERGE, in Somalia is for something Mock calls "really innovative."

The goal of the project is to get people out of severe poverty through a combination of counseling, livelihood training and investments, and some health-type interventions.

"The idea is basically that you prepare people with a... way that they can make an income," she says. A grant then provides the materials, tools, or assets they need to implement that income plan

The grant can go toward livestock to raise and sell as food, fishing equipment, a sewing machine for making clothing and textiles, or cash to purchase such materials.

The program is an investment that enables people to pull themselves out of poverty so they can become self-sufficient. The result is much less costly than continuing to support expensive humanitarian assistance.

"It's basically intended to mitigate repetitive humanitarian assistance in places like Somalia, where we would just give humanitarian assistance year after year," Mock says. "How do we avoid that? The strategy is to focus on pulling people out of abject poverty and getting them to the point where they can take care of themselves to a large extent." The hope is that there would be less intervention needed in the future in the event of a drought or other disaster.

The second grant involved evaluating a similar project in Haiti. But Tulane's role there is specifically to see if there is impact, and if that impact is sustained, in other words, if the program is working.

Both Somalia and Haiti are among the most vulnerable places for humanity in that they are very economically disadvantaged and increasingly prone to disasters such as droughts, flooding, and disease outbreaks. Mock calls it a “resilience-type investment,” providing assistance upfront when it’s less costly than following a disaster. Yes, prevention is what public health is all about!

“These areas are prone to different types of disasters, and we’re trying to enable them to manage those risks themselves for the most part, as opposed to relying on large scale humanitarian assistance from the United States.”

The idea that at-risk communities can better weather emergencies through poverty reduction programs and stronger safety nets is not a new one, and the hope is that the future populations in areas of significant strife won’t require extraordinary humanitarian response.

For now, these two programs are still working toward achieving these goals. And while the long-term future of those grants is not assured, they represent optimism during a turbulent time.