This project recommended for Afghanistan seeks to empower mothers and children through learn-and-play cards — cards that provide critical information about first aid and basic hygiene on their fronts, and a fun zoo puzzle on their backs.
INTRODUCTION:
The human rights and empowerment group at the Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change worked for three weeks to create projects that supported the rights of disenfranchised groups in nations the UNDP typically targets. The group zeroed in on the critical importance of supporting women and youth in developing nations and created projects to solve major problems they identified after research. After much research, the group opted to align itself with one of the UNDP’s major goals for empowerment — education for human rights — because education can push long term change. This group is recommending three projects, in Afghanistan, Argentina and Iraq.

- The project recommended for Afghanistan seeks to empower mothers and children through learn-and-play cards — cards that provide critical information about first aid and basic hygiene on their fronts, and a fun zoo puzzle on their backs.
- The project recommended for Argentina seeks to empower young girls through a card guessing game that teaches them about career possibilities — a game that helps girls recognize that they have the skills to reach their dreams.
- The project recommended for Iraq aims to empower youths by providing them with an web platform to upload and accurately caption their photographs of the events, people and places that matter to them — photos that can then be used by others to tell good news stories about Iraq.

PART I: FRAMING THE PROBLEM
Country: Afghanistan
Issue: Women and Children's access to Health information in Afghanistan

Rationale, Challenge and Audience:
When we were given the task to solve a problem in a developing world, we knew from the start that we wanted to help women take control of their own and their families’ health. Due to the high child mortality rates and short life expectancy in Afghanistan, education on basic hygiene and first aid issues for women and children were identified as a viable model to unify mothers, children and the larger community around a common core issue. “One Afghan women dies about every two hours from pregnancy-related causes and while childhood mortality is decreasing, it remains the highest in the region. ‘We still have a very long way to go,’ said the Afghan public health minister, Suraya Dalil.”

Lack of basic health care knowledge in Afghanistan is the main contributor to the high child mortality rate and the low life expectancy in the country. Overall life expectancy has increased in recent years from 45 to 62 for the general population; however, in rural areas this age is much smaller. The introduction of basic health education reduced child mortality rates, which in turn increased the life expectancy. However, Al-jazeera reports today that one in ten children will die before their fifth birthday, and the childhood mortality rate is still at 10 percent. Diseases like tuberculosis and polio plague the population. It is important our solution works with parents and children - especially mothers, as they spend most of the time caring for the children. The healthy habits need to be fostered in the home to enhance the project’s success.

Role of the Media:
There are numerous challenges in Afghanistan that need to be addressed when introducing a media solution. The rate of literacy is low - it’s approximately 28 percent, and literacy is concentrated to the male population. In rural areas, women have especially low rates of literacy, often falling below one percent. Consequently, we need to find a way around illiteracy, perhaps by using pictures or auditory solutions.

PART II: THE SOLUTION
**Our solution:**
The Wonder Cards project aims to educate women and children primarily in rural Afghanistan on hygiene and first aid through **fun, collectable cards**. These cards will target children between ages four and older, but will also educate their young mothers. Here’s how: we plan to create a deck of 50 cards distributed through midwives in small villages or through commonly bought products like Coca Cola products or shampoos. One side of the card will show a basic hygiene tip through icons and a few words, while the other will show a piece of a bigger picture that, when put together with other cards, will form a zoo map. Children will collect and trade these cards until they form a zoo map of their own, on which they can play with their own toys, or even use homemade toys. Ideally these cards will promote not only healthy play in childhood, but also basic hygiene and health care. They will also form a bond between mother and child, as well as promote equality between sexes at a young age.

After one year, we hope to evaluate the success of the program by considering where the cards worked, whether health care practices have improved and whether the improvements are lasting. If the cards have been successful, we believe they can be used in myriad ways to educate people in different developing areas on issues from pre and postnatal care to environmental issues.

**Implementation:**
The Wonder Cards are a **low cost solution** to a major problem in Afghanistan. Expenses will include printing fees and the materials for making cards and packages. If the cards eventually expand and are redeemed for small prizes (like shampoo or soap) the cost would increase slightly. In order to cover expenses and to relate to the theme, we hope to approach a zoo to help fund the project. In this case, the zoo mat can be the actual map of the zoo we chose. The Denver Zoo has potential to become a partner because they do a lot of outreach, both within and outside the United States. We also plan to approach the Coca Cola Foundation - a group run by the soda company that donates to local communities and focuses on women and health with donations. If they choose to be part of the project, we could distribute the cards not only through midwives, but also through soda products. We may also rely on funding through crowdsourcing or by pairing with female-centric NGOs in Afghanistan like the Afghanistan Women’s Educational Center. We also hope to partner with The Red Crescent and the World Health Organization to create our hygiene and first aid tips, as they have the most potential to provide accurate health information in Afghanistan. We’re planning to have a one-year test for the project. After that, if we get positive results, we suggest to expand the project to large issues like prenatal and postnatal education.

We plan to test the project in a small area of Afghanistan for three months starting in January 2015. We would introduce the cards to citizens and let children and women play and share the cards with one another. We would actively observe their interactive process and see if participants are interested and engaged, which we would measure by how often the children play with the cards and whether they shared them with their mothers. If not, we need to ask them why and find ways to improve.

The expected intermediate outcomes of this project include: (1) **improved quality of gender-sensitive and equitable health care services for women and children**; and (2) **improved hygiene and health practices, including nutrition, by women, children**. We will assess these expected outcomes in the following ways: We plan to survey women and children verbally to determine the basic hygiene knowledge and whether they enjoy the cards.