

# Human Rights Advancement In Guatemala

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## Personal Story

As a native Colombian first-generation immigrant and student, I have been acutely aware of the struggles faced by impoverished communities. I am determined to use my education to give back to communities and make a difference in the world.

After completing my undergraduate studies and becoming a trauma therapist, I have come to pursue a Human Rights doctoral program here at Monmouth University. The program has been incredibly rewarding and has allowed me to expand my knowledge of global human rights issues and develop practical skills for making a difference in the world.

As part of my doctoral studies, I am currently working on a CAPstone project focused on improving the lives of impoverished communities in Guatemala. I am partnering with A Better Life Guatemala, a nonprofit organization that provides critical resources and support to communities in need.

Through this project, I truly hope to make a tangible impact in bettering the lives of Guatemalan natives. I also hope to advance my own research and academic goals. It is an honor to be able to use my education and skills to make a difference in the world, and I am grateful for the opportunities that have brought me to this point in my journey.



Better Life Guatemala (ABLG) is a registered non-profit organization with operations in both Guatemala and the United States. With a special focus on the rural Mayan communities in Guatemala, ABLG is committed to improving the lives of the Guatemalan people by providing them with access to quality care and services. ABLG's mission is to promote sustainable community development through a range of programs designed to address critical issues such as systemic poverty, food insecurity, socioeconomic inequality, and lack of access to education and services. ABLG is dedicated to promoting indigenous human rights and empowering communities to build a better future for themselves and their families. ABLG has various programs supporting the fundamental human right to live a life worth dignity and respect as outlined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Since its inception in grassroots work prior to 2018 and 2021, ABLG has practiced inclusive transformational leadership, where the board and members are intentionally diverse and welcoming to people of all genders, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Through its work, ABLG is making a meaningful impact on the lives of the people it serves and creating a more equitable and just society for Guatemalans.

## HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAMMING

ABLG promotes the United Nations Sustainable Goal Development (SDG) by focusing on SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, and 8, which include eradicating poverty, promoting good health and well-being, providing quality education, promoting gender equality, and promoting decent work and economic growth. Below are some of ABLG's current programs addressing these SDGs:

- **Water Filters:** Millions of Guatemalans face life-threatening water contamination due to pollution, deforestation, and poor infrastructure. *TivaWater's* water filters are provided to families for clean access to water. These easy-to-use durable filters' use a slow sand filter technology is a game-changer, eliminating dangerous bacteria that cause deadly diseases.
- **Food Bags:** In Guatemala, 50% of families lack a balanced diet, leading to high rates of child malnutrition. Adolescent girls suffer from significant malnutrition problems. Sponsored food bags provide a family with 42 nourishing meals, making a life-changing impact. We distributed over 80,000 meals to Guatemalan families during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Bunk Beds:** Sleeping on the floor is harmful to health. It causes sleep deprivation, back pain, and stiffness, and exposes the body to cold, mites, fungi, mold, and bacteria. Sleeping in a comfortable bed improves physical and mental performance, reduces the risk of heart disease and diabetes, and increases happiness and quality of life. Everyone deserves good sleep.
- **Rural Clinics:** Diabetes is a major threat to indigenous Guatemalans. ABLG is committed to improving lives and making a lasting social impact by addressing the many challenges of making healthcare more accessible and maintaining responsible, ethical, and social business practices. Current partnerships with organizations like *Partners in Health* have expanded programming to address Tuberculosis. Currently, nutrition education efforts are also underway and COVID-19 assistance is prioritized. ABLG strives to make its best efforts to fund eye care through donations and medical volunteer work and hope to increase sustainability for such programs.



## DOCTORAL STUDIES

ABLG has a strong track record of collaborating with partners and receiving support from private donors to fund their programs. However, program fund sustainability is an issue that persists in developing countries' non-profits, and this is something that I aim to assist with through this funding. This fund represents a valuable opportunity to support my research efforts and contribute to the development of programming aimed at enhancing the livelihoods of indigenous communities in Guatemala. Specifically, the research CAPstone project in submission will explore the needs and wants of native Guatemalans in the Quetzaltenango region, with the aim of designing a program or social innovation that is culturally informed and sensitive to the unique perspectives and values of the community.

The findings of this research will be instrumental in developing sustainable and community-led initiatives aimed at enhancing the local economy and promoting self-reliance. As a doctoral student in the Human Rights Leadership program at Monmouth University, this research will inform my CAPstone project and further my understanding of cultural competence and culturally affirming services. This can look like an agro-educational program for the community, or a social impact publication product that enhances fund sustainability by telling the narratives of Guatemalan natives to support indigenous businesses and culture.

Ultimately, the impact of this research extends beyond academic pursuits and will contribute to the development of real-life solutions to address social determinants of health, including issues related to malnutrition, child mortality, lower education, and substance use.

More importantly, my project will shine a light on the strengths of communities and ways of combating colonization and exploitation of Indigenous socioeconomic structures. The funding will play a critical role in enabling me to travel to Guatemala, immerse myself in the local community, and gather first-hand insights that will help inform the development of culturally sensitive programming.



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