



Newsletter from the Sierra Madre #42

August, 2000



Project PROJIMO: a program run by and for disabled young persons in western Mexico

HEALTHWRIGHTS
Workgroup for People's Health and Rights

Project Piaxtla: a villager-run health care network in the mountains of western Mexico

The main article in this newsletter tells you about a number of remarkable projects on the coast of the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. These projects are of timely importance as possible models for the direction we need to move in if we are to overcome the interrelated social, economic and ecological crises of our times. Yet we would be wise to learn from the weaknesses and blindspots of such pioneering projects as well as from their strengths and visionary spirit.

The newsletter also includes an update on PROJIMO and shows some of the innovative wheelchairs and other mobility aids that it custom designs for individual disabled children. An update on the People's Health Assembly includes a PHA Facts Sheet for those who may want to be involved or attend the international event in December. Announcements include a new paper by D.W. on Poverty and Health in the North; a guidebook for care of Landmine Victims, and a new video on PROJIMO.

STRUGGLE FOR SUSTAINABLE HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING ON THE COAST OF OAXACA, MEXICO

by David Werner

In May, 2000, a group from ASHOKA, a US-based charitable foundation that gives grants to innovators for the common good, visited a number of projects for sustainable development on the coast of Oaxaca in Southern Mexico. Here David Werner, who accompanied the Ashoka group, relates his observations and raises challenging questions about unforeseen contradictions and pitfalls in these visionary ventures.

Saving Oaxaca—for and from whom?

Oaxaca, in southern Mexico, is a picturesque state with extraordinary cultural, geographic and biological diversity – now seriously endangered. Like neighboring Chiapas, the state of Oaxaca still has a high population of indigenous (so-called "Indian") people with rich traditional customs and crafts. Both the tribal people and local environment have been ruthlessly exploited. Hurricanes and floods—due in part to deforestation—have caused further distress. And adding another dimension to the harsh imbalances (yet,

according to some analysts, offering a possible way out of economic and environmental demise), tourism is fast becoming one of the state's major enterprises.

With its combination of beauty and disasters, Oaxaca has also attracted a deluge of development workers, change agents, ecologists, and evangelists. Similar to the Guatemala highland, in recent years this state in southern Mexico has become an epicenter for charities and NGOs (non-governmental organizations) promoting sustainable environmental and/or human development.

Some of the visionary agents-of-change are leftists, guided by commitment to equity and balance, peace and social justice. Others are rightist development pundits who seek to improve local economic conditions through promoting family and community-based micro-enterprises. Some of these latter are funded by multinational corporations or US banks, which perhaps see these popular projects as a pacification strategy to placate growing unrest among the destitute "indios oaxacaños," and thus prevent them from joining the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas.

However, many of the "agents of change" working in Oaxaca insist they are "apolitical." They appear to be on the prickly fence between the left and right. Or better said, they are essentially left-leaning idealists who believe strongly in social equality, but who—perhaps because they see few options—have adopted certain right-wing neoliberal market approaches in their attempt to help disadvantaged individuals or small groups improve their situation and/or protect the local ecosystem.

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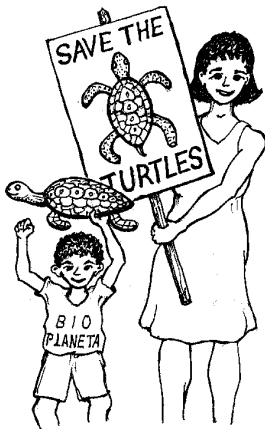
Anna Johansson, leader of Piña Palmera, helps Marta Heredia, grantee from Ashoka, roll her wheelchair through sand at an ecotourism project on the coast of Oaxaca.

From saving turtles to saving turtle-hunters.

Among the first wave of NGO projects in coastal Oaxaca were those committed to saving the forests, mangrove swamps, and marine life, especially sea turtles. Early environmentalists focused so exclusively on protecting "nature" that they overlooked the pressing needs of the local people, whom they saw as exploiters of the environment rather than an equally exploited part of it.

The slaughter of sea turtles was truly horrendous! In the small town of Mazunte in some seasons over 200 sea turtles were killed every day. They were "harvested" primarily for their eggs, but also for meat and shells, and their oil was sold as a cure-all. The stink of rotting turtle guts permeated the entire town and miles of coastline. The stench is said to have lasted for 3 years after the slaughtering ceased!

In the face of such carnage, which drastically reduced the number of turtles and threatened some species with extinction, environmentalists and animal-rights advocates worldwide, but mostly from the US and Mexico, took action. They mounted a huge SAVE THE TURTLES campaign. Mazunte was one



of the primary towns targeted. Under enormous national and international pressure, the Mexican government at last passed laws prohibiting the killing of sea turtles.

But with the enforcement of such laws, the economy of the coastal villages collapsed. Children suffered from increased malnutrition. Leading environmentalists received death threats from the destitute residents of Mazunte.

Eco-economics.

As has been the case worldwide in the last decade, the environmental movement in Oaxaca has more or less divided into two parts. One group has kept its relatively narrow objective to rescue endangered plants and animals from the destructive forces of man. The other group has taken a more holistic or humanistic view, recognizing that protecting endangered flora and fauna also necessitates protecting endangered peoples who live in high bio-diversity habitats.

In Oaxaca, some environmentalists--including ones whose lives had been threatened--have now become leaders of what can be called "humanitarian ecology." They try to help the native peoples—including former turtle hunters—develop communities that are both economically and ecologically sustainable. The goal is for everyone to

find ways to live healthy lives and meet their basic needs in ways that preserve and renew the local flora and fauna rather than to simply exploit them. Thus coastal Oaxaca has joined the budding international movement to achieve sustainable development through designing "healthy communities".

Within this new paradigm which includes what has been called "eco-economics" (or ecologically sound economics), a whole range of innovative projects has evolved along the Oaxaca coast. Most are facilitated by national or local NGOs with such visionary titles as "Ecosta," "Ecosolar," and "Bioplanets." Their objective is to help local people work cooperatively to make a living in ways that are harmonious and nurturing of the natural environment. The projects we visited or whose leaders met with us included:

- A cooperative organic cosmetic factory (in the town of Mazunte)
- A women's cooperative organic peanut butter and organic sesame-seed butter factory
- Two eco-tourism projects in a coastal forest and mangrove swamp
- A tourist project where guests pay to stay in the homes of local families
- An organic chocolate cooperative
- A cooperative processing plant for organic coffee
- A sustainable biology research station for economic viability
- A community-based rehabilitation program with a sustainable environment component
- A community-run compressed-earth brick factory (for rebuilding hurricane damaged houses)

Most of these projects are highly innovative and can boast remarkable achievements. Most network with one another, especially at the level of advisors and sponsors. Nearly all include community education activities to raise local awareness about the importance of bio-diversity and preservation of the environment.

In keeping with their goal of eco-sustainability, many of these programs (or the NGOs sponsoring them) have rules requiring biological replacement of natural resources that are used. For example, a crafts project that uses wood from local trees, or a program that uses wood for construction, receives support only if it also conducts a reforestation activity. Indeed, most of the projects we visited (including the program for disabled persons, Piña Palmera) have extensive nurseries of timber and fruit trees which provide seedlings for reforestation. Similarly, we observed creative

measures to prevent environmental contamination through biological sewage disposal. For example, the cooperative cosmetic factory in Mazunte has constructed an elaborate system where water from toilets and laundry passes through a series of bacterial and algal treatment tanks, and finally into a pond with nitrogen-fixing plants, so that the end product--clean water!--can be safely used for watering the gardens.

Contradictions and pitfalls

In our daily lives many of us tend to become short-sighted. *We fail to see the forest for the trees.* But for those of us who try to look far ahead—who dream of helping to build a healthier, fairer, more sustainable world—sometimes our shortcoming is farsightedness. *We fail to see the trees for the forest.* We focus so hard on the larger picture that we become blind to some critical details which may in time be of vital importance.

The projects we visited in coastal Oaxaca were truly outstanding. Time and again we saw local people working collectively to come out ahead economically and ecologically. We met with visionary facilitators. It was thrilling to see farm workers, fisher folk, and former turtle hunters voice their shared commitment to a healthy and sustainable future.

Yet nothing is perfect. As we visited one after another of these forward-looking projects, a few of us "outsiders" became increasingly concerned that some of the activities so avidly promoted might be contradictory to the egalitarian and eco-sustainable vision subscribed to.

In focusing on some of these possible contradictions and pitfalls, I do not wish to belittle the achievements of these programs, but to offer what I hope is constructive criticism. I record these observations in our newsletter in hopes they may serve others who are also working, along many different paths, toward more equitable, compassionate, and sustainable paradigms of development.



The Ashoka team visits with women at the Mazunte Cooperative Peanut Butter Factory. The thatch roof covers the arched ceilings of buildings made of strong, water-resistant compressed earth.

Examples of contradictions in the different Oaxacan sustainable development programs:

1. Organic peanut butter for direct producer-to-consumer sale through the Internet.

Many of the contradictions noted in the projects visited had to do with economics: who wins and who loses? Consider the Mazunte Women's Cooperative Peanut Butter Factory. This model program has been promoted by environmental humanists who brought together village women whose families had suffered hunger and hardships as a result of the new laws protecting sea turtles. Since these families traditionally grow peanuts, the plan was to expand peanut production and make it profitable for families to produce peanut butter, which could be bottled and sold commercially. The peanuts were to be grown organically (without chemical fertilizers or pesticides), not only because this is environmentally correct but because organic foods bring higher prices – at least among certain consumers.

However most Mexican villagers do not appreciate the magic of organic foods. So to sell the peanut butter, there was a need to develop distant markets. One of the main NGOs aiding projects in Oaxaca is aggressively promoting *marketing through the Internet*. As they see it, this advances another related goal: promoting direct producer-to-consumer sales, thus eliminating money-grubbing middlemen. By advertising on the Net, folks who value organic foods can buy them directly from producers, even in distant lands!

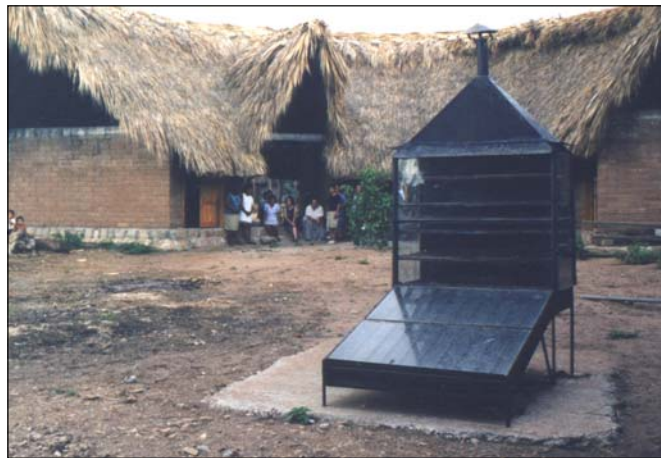
This approach will require helping villagers in Mazunte and elsewhere get computers and become computer literate--not a small or inexpensive task. But with all the rhetoric today about "closing the communication gap between rich and poor," donations from funding agencies and multinationals (especially those into cyber-technology) can be raised.

The pros and cons of such electronic marketing are debatable, and communities should have a chance to weigh them carefully. Unfortunately, as we observed first hand, these grandiose plans were announced to the village women of the peanut butter factory in a manner that called for passive acceptance rather than critical discussion. The women, being polite, quietly consented.

There was no discussion with the women, nor apparent awareness among the facilitators, of the potential contradictions and pitfalls in this long distance, high tech, marketing approach, namely: Peanuts—when grown by families—are a mar-

velous low-cost, energy and protein-rich supplement for babies' weaning foods. Education to help mothers understand why to add crushed peanuts to baby food could bring a big improvement in child health and survival, even for very poor families. (This has been demonstrated in Africa.) However, turning locally-grown peanuts into a costly commercial "organic" product prices them out of reach of poor families. The new packaging offers the same economic trap as do many commercialized products. In Mexico families now sell their home-grown maize (corn) to buy costly products such as Maizena (a commercial weaning food), Maizoro (cornflakes) and Maseca (commercial corn flour for making tortillas.) No wonder malnutrition in Mexican children has increased 30% since NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) was introduced in 1994! And no wonder Citibank and Maseca Corporation are the chief funders of the environmentalists' venture to marketing Oaxacan goods on the Net ! *

Within the environmentalist movement there is awareness of the ecological costs of exporting food products to distant lands. Excessive use of fossil fuels is a big cause of global warming, and energy used to ship foods long distance adds to the problem. In the US the foods a typical family consumes have traveled an average of 2000 miles. For this reason, there is an international movement to consume more local produce and avoid imported foods. Promoting distant marketing of organic



In front of the Mazunte Cooperative Peanut Butter Factory, a solar oven has been built to toast the peanuts.

peanut butter and other local products therefore conflicts with the environmentalist principles of energy conservation. Yet there had apparently been little debate about this.

Although the idea of producer-to-consumer sales through the Internet is supposed to increase profits for the local producers and lower them for consumers, in reality it caters to elite consumers who

have access to computers and the Net (less than 1% of the world's people). And the prices of "organic" products in general makes them luxury goods inaccessible to the vast majority. (One third of humanity earns less than US\$2 per day.)

Another contradiction lies in how the peanut butter factory was constructed. The facilitators wanted to build a model unit that was both ecologically correct and aesthetic. So rather than use traditional architecture, they designed an elegant structure with domed roofs and walls of cement-reinforced pressed-earth bricks. Importantly, the building is earthquake and hurricane resistant. But the cost has been so high that the funds donated for it were used up before it was completed. As a result, the women of the cooperative have for the last 3 years been pouring all their earnings from peanut butter sales into construction costs, without realizing any benefits for their families.

While this model production unit may appear as an example of ecologically and economically sound appropriate technology to visitors and funders, in fact it has led to prolonged economic sacrifice for the women involved.

2. Pressed-earth bricks: appropriate technology at high cost.

Another self-sufficiency project in a coastal village was a small cooperative brick factory. By pressing blocks of earth at very high pressure, they are converted into strong water-resistant bricks. Because there is no need to fire them, there is no use of firewood or fossil fuels – an environmental plus! Initial costs for the factory were high because powerful presses were imported from Europe. But the funds for this were provided by international donors.

The brick factory was begun in response to earthquakes and floods that destroyed thousands of poor people's houses. The bricks were to be used for constructing new, low-cost, relatively disaster-proof buildings.

In terms of quality, the bricks were a great success. They are remarkably strong and water-resistant. The chief problem has been cost. To be profitable, the new bricks must sell for more than commercial cement blocks and much more than ordinary adobe (mud) blocks, which many families make themselves. As a result, local sales have been minimal. The pressed-earth bricks have been used mainly for the projects facilitated by the same groups that initiated the brick factory. Indeed, one reason for the high construction costs of the peanut butter factory were the environmentally correct, but expensive bricks.

* Note: To add insult to injury, Maseca is processed without soaking the dried kernels in lime-water as is the tradition when preparing maize for tortillas. Soaking with lime adds calcium and makes essential amino acids nutritionally more accessible. Using Maseca, the traditional diet of tortillas and beans is no longer adequately balanced. For this reason there was debate within the NGO as whether it would be ethical to accept funding from the Maseca Corporation. The decision was made on the grounds that "even dirty money can be put to clean use."

3. Organic cosmetics.

A similar problem of cost has occurred at the Mazunte Cosmetic Factory. In this very attractive community cooperative, townspeople produce a range of organic creams, balms, and liniments from a variety of local and cultivated plants. The co-op is sponsored by The Body Shop, which helps distribute its products in their shops in the US and elsewhere. But local sales are low, even among tourists, because the prices are so much higher than equivalent products on the market.



The cooperative organic cosmetic factory in Mazunte helps people who used to hunt sea turtles earn a livelihood.

As is true elsewhere, this project's unusually high prices may be related to the initial generous funding from outside sources, which has created a degree of dependency and inefficiency.

Too often outside innovators come into a community with idealistic plans, which somehow don't match the local reality. For example, one of the innovations of the cosmetic factory was a spacious child care center, built of bamboo. Its purpose was to allow mothers to keep their young children nearby and well cared for while they worked. On visiting the factory, however, we found the child care center is now used as a warehouse. They explained to us that the idea of a child care center was foreign to the local culture. Working mothers prefer to leave their babies at home with grandma or an older sister.

4. Ecotourism

Tourism is a fast growing industry in coastal Oaxaca. With it comes a two-tiered society, the servants and the served. However, environmentalists are trying to make the best of the situation by encouraging ecotourism. For example, instead of timbering coastal forests for golf courses and malls, or destroying mangrove swamps to build shrimp farms, they find resources to help



This biological treatment system in the organic cosmetic factory turns sewage into clean water without use of chemicals.

local inhabitants turn the tropical forests and mangrove swamps into nature reserves where visitors can observe a diversity of primeval life in a way that is minimally harmful to the ecological balance and that brings income to the locals.

We had the opportunity to visit two beautiful sites of ecotourism. One had a rustic restaurant serving gourmet seafood, overlooking a magnificent view of a mangrove bordered lagoon. The other site, also in a mangrove swamp, uses rowboats (no motorboats) to take groups of tourists through crocodile haunted waters to the nesting sites of egrets, jacanas, and spoonbills. The birds have learned they are safe from hunters, and tolerate the proximity of hyper-active nature watchers.

All in all, it seemed a good alternative to tourism at its worst. Yet with the increasing number of tourists, a number of small independent shops and kiosks had already sprung up on one of the central islands of the reserve. Plastic garbage and other litter of the tourist trade had begun to accumulate in backwaters. And plans had been made to open up new waterways to less accessible areas of the swamp.

Beyond doubt, ecotourism is better than ordinary tourism in terms of protecting the environment. It brings income to a portion of the local population. But the tourist culture, eco- or not, brings with it demands and compromises that are in some ways at odds with an equitable and ecologically balanced community.

5. Ecologically-sound income-generating innovations.

One of the largest, most innovative and most successful programs we visited involved biological research and development of pragmatic solutions to environmental problems, along with income generating activities.

Its projects included everything from forest conservation and the breeding of iguanas (green ones for pets, black ones for food) and crocodiles. Neem trees had been introduced from India for the production of natural (non-chemical) pesticides. "Beneficial parasites" were being bred for "biological control" of plant pests. Species of beans which are extra good at fixing nitrogen were being produced in quantity and promoted among local farmers.

An effort was also under way to rescue indigenous (criollo) food crops such as maize, beans, rice, bananas, etc., to learn about their unique adaptations for drought or pest resistance, and to explore their commercialization.



The Ashoka team visits an ecotourism project in a mangrove swamp full of crocodiles and many beautiful birds. No motorboats allowed!

Other activities include state of the art apiaries on a commercial scale, fish breeding (Tilapia), and rabbit raising for family-level income generation. Another activity includes the study of medicinal plants for possible production and commercialization.

This multi-spectrum project, which serves 3 coastal municipalities, was one of the most outstanding we visited in terms of coming to grips with real environmental problems as well as human needs. The program leaders worked closely and respectfully with the local people. The staff included a number of elderly farmers and forest dwellers as "expert advisors" in the study of criollo crops, medicinal plants, and attributes of the local flora. Both from the ecological and human perspective, a lot of the program's activities seemed well-thought out and pragmatic.

Nevertheless, as with many of the other projects we visited, the ambition to commercialize

and "enter the market economy" with family and community level products seemed at times to conflict with the other goals of eco-sustainability.

An example is the introduction of Neem trees from India, with the idea of using the seed as a biological pesticide. Grown and used at the family level as in India, this make sense. But the program—under pressure from funders and advisors—felt it needed to produce Neem as a commercial product for distribution to a national or international market. Again, the local staff was advised to distribute from "producer to distant consumers" through the Internet. They had planted a virtual forest of Neem trees and were producing tons of seed. But some of the staff admitted this made little economic sense.

True, kilo for kilo, Neem seed could be produced and sold at a lower cost than chemical pesticides. But to protect a given crop against pests, many times as much pulverized seed as chemical had to be used. This made the Neem more costly, and less practical in terms of bulk, storage and shipping costs. As a local home-grown alternative it works well. Neem also serves for fire wood, as fodder, as an antiseptic, and even for homemade toothbrushes. But as a commercial product, especially for distant distribution, it was unrealistic.

In terms of biodiversity, a more serious contradiction was the project to develop and propagate "beneficial parasites" to attack insects that plague certain food crops, such as cabbage. The project coordinator explained that one advantage of these beneficial parasites is that once they have been introduced they tend to multiply and spread to neighboring fields. We questioned whether these new "beneficial parasites" might not get out of control and precipitate a disaster, as has happened elsewhere. But we were assured "there is little danger of this since these beneficial parasites only attack Lepidopterans."

Only Lepidopterans!
The order Lepidoptera includes every species of butterflies and moths! Rachel Carson, author of "Silent Spring," would turn in her grave! Lepidopterans, apart from their beauty and stunning diversity, play a role in the balance of life. Different species pollinate a variety of plants which in turn might become extinct without them. Caterpillars of some Lepidopterans form an important part in the food chain of many birds and other animals. Only Lepidopterans! My god!



Nearly all the projects we visited on the Oaxaca coast had extensive nurseries of indigenous plants and trees for reforestation. This nursery is in an ecotourism reserve in a mangrove swamp.

It seemed incredible that a group of ecology conscious people, for the sake of implementing the ideal of chemical-free, biological pest control for production of organic foods, could run the risk of threatening with extinction a whole order of the animal kingdom, the butterflies! More frightening still, in their zeal, apparently no one had even thought about that colossal risk!

Global vision and tunnel-vision

I came away from Oaxaca with many good impressions, but mixed feelings. On the one hand, we had witnessed many wonderful things. Against considerable odds local people—assisted by outside facilitators—are working together cooperatively and harmoniously to meet their needs in a way designed to safeguard the environment long into the future. People who had been used to living from one day to the next, depleting the future to survive in the present, now share a common vision and look forward to a healthier, more balanced common future for their children. If only more people—including the world's leaders—could wisely share that vision!

On the other hand, nothing is perfect. To be human is to err. Time and again, as we visited different programs, we encountered contradictions. In some cases program leaders were aware of the contradictions and were trying to overcome them. But in other cases the contradictions had not been perceived or had not been squarely faced.

It strikes me that there is often a paradox among outstanding pioneers, whether spiritual giants, political leaders, change agents, or builders of new paths for humanity. To make breakthroughs in new directions, such persons need a broad, all-embracing vision, a formidable insight. Yet at the same time, to achieve any real change, they need to be able to focus their energy in a particular direction. Thus, in the evolution of their dream, their initial broad vision steadily narrows into a

blindingly bright beam, or tunnel vision. Pitfalls and contradictions beyond the periphery of that brilliant focus of energy are sometimes overlooked.

And if the visionaries themselves fall into such traps, their followers—who have a tendency to turn vision into doctrine and innovation into dogma—can develop tunnel vision at an even more extreme level. Thus the Jew from Nazareth who gave the world a religion of love and forgiveness became the icon for the brutal Inquisition, for the persecution of harmless deviants of every ilk, and—more recently—for the murder of doctors who perform taboo procedures. Thus the humanitarian founder of "relativity" and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Albert Einstein, gave humanity the means

of global annihilation. And thus one of the world's greatest revolutionaries, Fidel Castro, has given Cuba the best health system of any poor country, but in his efforts of equity has denied certain political rights to his people.

Sustainable development that embraces both ecological and human needs with a sense of equity and compassion now seems "the way forward" for many who dare to look ahead unselfishly. For some, this holistic, all-inclusive vision has become a sort of new religion. It gives a sense of meaning and hope in an endangered world whose leadership has sold out to the highest bidder.

Yet if the vision of sustainable development is to follow a course that is ecologically sound and socially just, it is imperative that each of us, as we work together toward common goals, keep our eyes and sensibilities wide open. Above all, we must strive to be humble, and always on the outlook for contradictions and pitfalls.

In sum, the visit to Oaxaca was an opportunity to see people do their best to live in healthy sustainable balance with each other and with nature. I was thrilled by the innovative programs, by the spirit and commitment of those involved, and by the gains achieved. But I likewise became more aware of how our blindspots and Achilles' heels develop, and how important it is that we be on the alert for them.

One of the most important things I learned from our visit to Oaxaca was the need to reexamine the projects in which I myself am involved or have played a facilitating role. I want to reconsider my role in Mexico and internationally. While I and my colleagues (from villagers to academics) have some grounds to celebrate our achievements, so we have reason to question, to reexamine, and to reflect. Progress is more likely if we recognize and learn from our mistakes.



UPDATE ON PROJIMO



The PROJIMO Skills Training and Work Program based in the village of Ajoya continues to evolve in exciting ways. One of the most innovative areas of activity is the Children's Wheelchair Workshop, headed by Gabriel Zepeda, who is himself a wheelchair user (paraplegic). The team builds a wide variety of wheelchairs, tricycles, and gurneys, designed and built to the individual needs and wishes of the child and family.

Because in Mexico only PROJIMO provides such creative and caring wheelchair designs, requests are now coming from other states and countries. This July and August, two students of industrial design from Delft, Holland have been helping the PROJIMO wheelchair team improve designs and quality control. Here are examples of some of the more innovative designs, adapted for children with especially challenging needs.



Born with hydrocephaly, this boy has a stiff neck, arms, and hips, and stiff, bent-back knees. He spent all his life lying on his back in bed until Gabriel (with hat) designed this adjustable gurney for him.

The gurney can be instantly adjusted anywhere from horizontal to almost vertical. When more upright, the boy can see better, and he relates better to the people and activities in front of him. When he tires, his mother can easily lower him again to a horizontal position.

He and his mother are delighted with his new gurney.



This mother has 4 children with muscular dystrophy. She works at a roadside food stand a mile from her house. She wanted a wheelchair in which she could transport all the children at once.

The PROJIMO team designed this chair for four passengers. The family is delighted.



Alejandro, a child with spina bifida, asked for a tricycle to go to and from school. Because he wanted to power it with both hands, the team built the trike using bicycle pedals and a chain.

Alejandro now speeds around on his new tricycle. His friends beg him to let him use it. It gives him greater confidence and independence.

Visit to Piña Palmera

During the travels with Ashoka, David Werner visited Piña Palmera, an outstanding community-based rehabilitation program on the coast of Oaxaca. For years Piña Palmera and PROJIMO have exchanged experiences and ideas. For example, Piña first learned about making wooden toys at PROJIMO. Now it has an economically successful toyshop surpassing PROJIMO's. The shop trains and employs disabled persons from surrounding communities.



A helper at Piña Palmera uses a set of picture boards to help a girl with cerebral palsy say what she wants by pointing to the appropriate drawings.

Update on the PEOPLE'S HEALTH ASSEMBLY (PHA2000)



The purpose of the PHA is to give a voice to concerned people around the world, especially the disadvantaged, in the events and decisions that shape their health and well-being.

Today the health of millions of people is compromised by global policies that concentrate wealth and leave a third of humanity living on less than 2 dollars a day. The PHA hopes to contribute to a bottom-up approach to decision-making and to a new, equitable model of development in which all people live fairly and compassionately with one another and in balance with the environment in a sustainable manner.

Preparations for The People's Health Assembly are rapidly gaining momentum. Scores of non-government organizations and activists from dozens of countries in Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe are now participating in PHA pre-conference activities. The PHA Analytic Committee has met several times in different parts of the world to write background papers and draft a preliminary outline for a People's Charter for Health.

A spectrum of funding organizations have agreed to help finance the PHA event in Bangladesh, so it looks as if funds will be available to help with the costs of a significant number of participants from poor countries and difficult circumstances. The staff of Gonoshasthaya Kendra (the People's Health Movement in Savar, Bangladesh) has been building facilities and making preparations for the 600 or so participants who plan to attend.

PHA FACT SHEET

Date of the major international PHA Event: Dec. 4-8,

Location: Savar, Bangladesh, hosted by Gonoshasthaya Kendra.

Participants: 600 persons from 100 countries

Who is invited: Persons concerned about and prepared to work for sustainable health and well being from the local to the global level

First chance for attendance will be given to:

- Persons in grassroots organizations or NGOs actively working to confront and correct the sociopolitical causes of poor health (poverty and inequity),
- especially those from poor countries or communities or from less powerful groups (women, refugees, oppressed minorities, disabled persons)
- Persons selected by local groups that have been involved in preparatory activities or meetings, or in assembling materials for the PHA

Travel assistance: will be available for some persons from poor countries
Preparatory materials which you can request for discussion and action include:

Packet of documents and guidelines on preparatory activities

PHA Framework Paper

Background papers on:

Political economy; Physical environment;

Social environment;

Health sector;

Communications for social action;

Outline for a People's Charter for Health.

If you want to attend the PHA event, to be involved, or want materials, contact:

PHA Secretariat, CI ROAP, 252-A Jalan Air Itam, 10460 Penang, Malaysia

Tel: 604-229 1318; Fax: 604-228 6506

Announcing

A provocative new paper by David Werner:

"Breaking the grip of globalization on poverty-related poor health: a perspective from the North."

keynote address to the NGO Forum for Health at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, May 15, 2000

available from HealthWrights for US\$5.00, postage included

This paper looks at poverty and poor health in the Northern industrialized countries and at the widening gap between rich and poor, especially in the United States. It relates this growing disparity to the power of giant corporations and wealthy interest groups, which have undermined the democratic process through vast donations to elect politicians who will do their bidding. As a result, the social progress following World War II has been cruelly reversed, to the point where public assistance to the needy has been drastically reduced. For example, one out of four children in the US lives in poverty, and 43 million Americans have no health insurance. Racism in the US also contributes to poverty and ill health. The mortality rate for white babies is 8 per 1000. For black babies it is 18 per 1000.

The paper shows how the inequitable US economic system of "growth for the rich at all costs" has been exported world-wide. It is imposed on poor countries by the World Bank, IMF and WTO through Structural Adjustment Programs and unfair trade policies.

Finally, the paper makes clear that to achieve a healthy, sustainable world, participatory democracy must be achieved in the US. Important first steps are via election campaign reforms, watchdogging of corporate greed, and well-organized mass protests with a strong educational component (such as the "Battle in Seattle.")

Announcing

A fine new guidebook by Hans Husum:

Save Lives, Save Limbs

Life support for victims of mines, wars and accidents

A superb hand book on emergency field care of persons injured by land mines or war. Says David W.: "Had I had this book as a healthworker in the mountains of Mexico, fewer injured persons would have died."

Available from Third World Network, 228 Macalister Rd, 10400, Penang, Malaysia. E-mail: twn@apc.org

Price: US\$40 (North), US\$10 (South) + surface mail \$4/copy

Announcing

A great new video of PROJIMO:

Our Own Road / Nuestro Camino

By Peregrine Productions.

Produced by Charlotte K. Beyers;

Directed by John Montoya. Available from HealthWrights for US\$25.00, + US\$5 postage

This beautiful, high quality video shows the day to day adventure of participatory problem solving at PROJIMO (Program of Rehabilitation vOrganized by Disabled Youth of Mexico) in villages in the Sierra Madre. An epic portrayal of independent living and empowerment, it shows how disabled village youth caringly provide skilled personalized services at low cost for and with needy families. This half hour video is available in both English and Spanish.

Please visit our World Wide Web site at: www.healthwrights.org

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This child with floppy cerebral palsy has low muscle tone and slumps forward when he sits. The adjust-able table on a wheelchair designed at PROJIMO can be raised to lift his arms and shoulders enough so that he can hold up his head. As he gains strength, his mother can lower the table bit by bit.

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This issue of *Newsletter from the Sierra Madre* was created by:

- David Werner - writing, photos, and drawings
- Margaret Paulson - production, proofreading, editing, scanning, and layout
- Catherine Nilsson - content editing
- Trude Bock - proofreading
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Not until the creation of decent conditions of life for all people are accepted as a common obligation of all people and countries shall we be able to speak of mankind as civilized."

—Albert Einstein