



Newsletter from the Sierra Madre #47

August, 2002



PROJIMO Community Based Rehabilitation Program

run by and for disabled villagers in western Mexico (Coyotitan)

HEALTHWRIGHTS

Workgroup for People's Health and Rights

PROJIMO Skills Training and Work Program

run by disabled youth in rural Mexico (Duranguito)

This issue looks at recent events in rural Sinaloa, Mexico, the home of the PROJIMO community-based programs run by disabled persons. First we look at the latest in a series of violent incidents in the area, which have forced first the PROJIMO Rehabilitation Program, and now the PROJIMO Work Program, to move to safer villages. We explore the socioeconomic roots of Mexico's epidemic of crime and violence. Next we look at the remarkable way the PROJIMO programs - especially the Children's Wheelchair Workshop - are evolving. In Mexico and beyond, there is new and rapidly growing interest in providing disabled kids with wheelchairs and appropriate assistance. Finally, we give an overview of an exciting new resource that HealthWrights is developing with the International People's Health Council, called the Politics of Health Knowledge Network.

Bad News and Good News from the Sierra Madre...

First the bad news: The Ajoya Massacre

Overlooking the Rio Verde in the foothills of Mexico's Sierra Madre, the village of Ajoya has for the last 37 years been the nucleus of the innovative community-based health and rehabilitation initiatives, Project Piaxtla and PROJIMO. These programs gave birth to the handbooks, *Where There Is No Doctor*, *Helping Health Workers Learn*, *Disabled Village Children*, and *Nothing About Us Without Us*. But tragically, the village is becoming a ghost town.

Like many of the villages of the Sierra Madre Occidental, for the last several years Ajoya has suffered a drastic increase in crime and violence, including drug trafficking, robberies, kidnappings, and killings. And like many other of these remote mountain villages, many families have been moving out, for what they hope are safer environments in the cities or along the coast.

Three years ago, after a wave of kidnappings and hold-ups, the main part of the PROJIMO Rehabilitation Program decided to move their base to the larger, safer village of Coyotitan, on the main north-south highway. In some ways this appears to have been a

wise move. The new Rehabilitation Center in Coyotitan has grown and is much more accessible for a wide range of disabled people and families in the coastal villages.

However, part of the PROJIMO team, including myself, decided to stay in Ajoya



Jorge (center) and friends, before he was slain in the Ajoya Massacre.

and try to weather the bad times. We were reluctant to abandon the village in its most difficult time. So those of us who remained started the Ajoya-based "PROJIMO Skills Training and Work Program." This program was set up to provide training and work opportunities not only to disabled persons, but also to unemployed youths who, for lack of opportunities, tend to get involved in drugs, gangs, and trouble. For a number of

years the PROJIMO Work Program has struggled through ups and downs in its attempt to achieve self-sufficiency. Its most outstanding success has been the Children's Wheelchair Program, in which disabled craftspeople and village youth collaborate to design and construct personalized wheelchairs for disabled kids with special needs (see page 5 for more information).

Following the opening of the Skills Training and Work Program in Ajoya, for a couple of years the hold-ups and kidnappings quieted down. The village seemed to be pulling together and was exploring new opportunities for income generation. We liked to think that the Work Program had improved the situation. But the peace didn't last. In fall of 2001, the violence resumed. During October and November eleven men lost their lives. Some were gunned down as they harvested their crops or tended their cattle outside of town.

Others were kidnapped, two on the main street of town in broad daylight, and were never seen again.

But now the dynamics of the violence are different. That of previous years mostly had been committed by small groups of jobless, disillusioned youths, some of who had got hooked on drugs. The motive for kidnapping had been "redistribution of wealth" and those

abducted were mostly sons of the rich. There was a sort of Robin Hood aura to the whole scene.

But the new wave of kidnapping and murder, sometimes including torture, though still involving some of the same, disillusioned young people, has links to organized crime. It involved a turf war between two rival gangs, each with links to powerful drug cartels in the state of Sinaloa. This had deteriorated into an escalating spiral of terrorism and vengeance. Ajoya was a hot-spot because, as a remote village deep into the foothills of the Sierra Madre, it had become a point of exchange between the hundreds of small drug growers farther back in the mountains, and traffickers making their way north up the coast with cocaine from South America. By hooking the mountain youths on cocaine and then swapping cocaine for locally grown crude opium, the traffickers could increase their earnings by ten times when they sold their drugs in the US.

At first the gang-related killings and kidnappings had targeted specific individuals with links to the rival gangs, or at worst they targeted their family members or compadres. Nevertheless, the entire village was terrified. At sunset everyone locked themselves in their homes. The dusty streets and village square, which in the good old days had been alive with music, frolicking children, and gossiping old folks late into the night, were now empty and hauntingly still. And people began to leave. Each time another person was kidnapped or killed, his whole extended family -- terrified about who might be next -- moved away to a distant town or city along the coast. As result of this exodus, by the turn of the year, the population of Ajoya had dropped from over 1000 to 500.

In a belated response to the lawlessness in Ajoya, toward the end of 2001 the state government stationed a rotating squadron of 12 "Prevention Police" in the village. Their presence gradually gave the remaining villagers a false sense of security. With a dozen heavily armed policeman guarding the village, who would dare to attack?

And sure enough, except for the occasional hold-up on the road into town, the first months of 2002 passed without major incidents of violence. Little by little the popula-

tion of Ajoya began to relax. Life seemed to be returning to normal.

And then came the massacre. It happened on the night of May 10th, which in Mexico is Mother's Day, one of the most holy and celebrated days of the year. Although for 3 or 4 years all major dances and nighttime festivities had been suspended in the village because of fear, the village decided to hold a big Mother's Day Fiesta. So to celebrate Mother's Day over half the village turned out for the dance on the main street. The 12 armed state Prevention Police stood vigil.

A little before midnight, when the street dance was in full swing, a group of what people assumed was another squadron of police arrived: 20 or so men dressed in gray uniforms, each equipped with a radio transmitter and armed with an M-16 machine gun. No one was worried. "More police mean more protection," the people naively thought.

Suddenly the men in gray opened fire on the unsuspecting Prevention Police who were



The New York Times reports on Mexico's wave of kidnappings (June 7, 2002)

standing guard. A raging gun battle ensued. Terrified, the crowd ran for safety. Frantically they pushed and shoved into the houses as the bullets flew. But as the people fled, the gunmen in gray fired at them, at random. Bullets struck people in their backs as they tried to push their way into the houses or ran down the alleys. It lasted about 10 minutes. Then the gunmen retreated down the alleyways, crossed the river and headed for the hills. Behind them they left the bodies of innocent people sprawled in the street and in the doorways of houses.

Twelve persons were killed and eight injured. These included 2 policemen dead and five wounded, two seriously. The youngest villager killed was a 7-year old boy, the oldest a 60-year-old woman. Two of the dead were brothers of Sergio, a local youth who has been running the PROJIMO Work Program's carpentry shop. One boy's death hit me especially hard, a 16-

year-old who I had helped pull through a life-threatening illness when he was eight. Often Jorge -- or Tote, as his friends called him -- had helped me to chase marauding pigs out of my garden and to water the wild orchids with which I had festooned the boughs of the giant fig tree that shades my house.

What made this massacre more terrifying than the previous violence in the village was that this time the killers were so heartlessly indiscriminate. They vented their anger and wrought revenge not on specific adversaries or their family members, but randomly, on the village as a whole. Now no one feels safe.

Roots of the massacre

I am still trying to understand the "chain of causes" behind this brutal massacre. There is little doubt that pride, rivalry, revenge, and machismo were a driving force. And so was deepening poverty and the voiceless desperation of the destitute. On a smaller scale -- yet no less tragic for those whose lives were immediately affected -- the tragic happening in Ajoya seems to echo the outbursts of unconscionable violence and terrorism that are increasingly plaguing the world.

In this newsletter I will not try to detail the complex forces, alliances and antagonisms that precipitated the Ajoya massacre. Frankly, I don't quite dare to, since I am not yet willing to forsake my home in Ajoya. That the horrific event involved rival drug gangs is certain, but there is much more behind it than drug wars. The massacre was a time bomb at the end of a long wick of desperate actions and reactions, which included the recent history of kidnappings, hold-ups and killings. It involved a gang of local vigilantes that formed for self-protection and revenge due to the failure of law enforcement at all levels. Most of these crimes and kidnappings were initiated not by large organized gangs or drug cartels (those links came later) but by desperate, impoverished youth. Many were adolescents and young men who had lost hope and direction, got hooked on drugs, and needed quick cash, a common story today around the world.

The roots of the Ajoya massacre and the wave of assaults and kidnappings that preceded it are far reaching. They tap into the long history of inequity, oppression of the

peasantry and working class by the ruling oligarchy, and institutionalized corruption. They are also tied to the trends of the international market, and to the global economic forces that place the interests of the wealthy before the basic needs of the people and the planet.

The wave of kidnappings in Ajoya is not an isolated event. Throughout Mexico, the incidence of assaults, kidnappings, and murder have escalated in the last several years. In the large cities the problem is worse than in the countryside. Mexico City has cases of kidnappings nearly every day. And according to a recent article in the New York Times (June 7, 2002) the police are often themselves involved in the kidnappings. The promises of the new President, Vicente Fox, to clean up crime and corruption have proved as empty as his promises to combat poverty.

The state of Sinaloa, where Ajoya is located, has been infamous for drug trafficking, crime, and corruption. The Sinaloan government has become so concerned about the epidemic of kidnappings that it has launched a strong-armed police campaign to control it. On the highways huge billboards declare Sinaloa's pride in its new "ANTI-SECUESTRADOS" (Counter-kidnapping) program. The signs depict a plump businessman in suit and tie standing beside his tender son, with a line-up of heavily armed storm troopers in bullet-proof vests standing vigilantly in the background.

But might doesn't make right. It will take more than a build-up of policemen and soldiers to combat kidnapping and terror. Indeed, the militaristic approach to resolving social unrest is a part of the problem. As Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye will make the whole world blind."

From NAFTA to kidnapping

Many analysts tie the growing subculture of violence in Mexico to NAFTA: the North American Free Trade Agreement. I have written about this in previous newsletters, and in our book, "Questioning the Solution: The Politics of Primary Health Care and Child Survival." In brief, NAFTA has to a large extent benefited big business and foreign investors at the expense of the poor. This is in part because, as a condition for



"Eye for an eye." The state of Sinaloa declares war on kidnapers.

Mexico's entry into NAFTA, the Mexican government was required to change its constitution and annul its agrarian reform laws. When the legislation that safeguarded the holdings of small farmers was rolled back, millions of hectares of the best farmland concentrated again into giant plantations, much of it now owned or controlled by giant US agribusiness. Also, NAFTA's lifting of tariffs on export to Mexico of US-subsidized grain and cattle has driven countless small farmers and herders in Mexico into bankruptcy.

As a consequence of all this, since the beginning of NAFTA in 1994, Mexico has seen a massive exodus of over 2 million small farmers to the mushrooming slums of the cities. In turn, in the cities, the huge influx of destitute job-hunters pushed real wages of day laborers down by 40%. This was followed by the crash of the peso in 1995, triggered by the sudden pull-out by foreign speculative investors, causing the closure of half of Mexico's small businesses, with subsequent massive unemployment. To make things worse, austerity measures and "structural adjustments" imposed to correct the crisis resulted in cut-backs in public assistance, and sales taxes were increased, resulting in still further hardships for the poor. The result was a pandemic of street children, drug trafficking, petty crime, and then kidnappings and assaults, precipitating a backlash of police brutality, corruption, and unsolved human rights violations.

This desperate situation in Mexico led in 2000 to the fall of the powerful PRI (Institutionalized Revolution Party), a corrupt oligarchy that had wielded heavy-handed, single-party control of the nation for

nearly 70 years. But the new PAN coalition party under Vicente Fox, though it promised to fight corruption and reduce crime, has not been effective at either. In terms of crime and kidnappings, the situation has worsened.

The physical violence in Mexico is the fruit of structural violence: namely the entrenched socioeconomic situation that allows the rich to get richer at the expense of the poor. Since the onset of NAFTA, both the numbers of people living in poverty and the percentage of malnourished children have increased. While millions of destitute people struggle to find jobs and feed their children, Mexico today has more billionaires per capita than any other nation! Although the aptly-named President Fox talks with a smooth tongue about lifting the poor out of poverty, this former chief of Coca Cola Mexico is in essence a Harvard-trained corporate executive and a great pal of George Bush. The fact that Fox kicked Fidel Castro out of the recent Monterrey Economic Summit as favor to Bush reveals his stars and stripes.

Despite Fox's beguiling pro-poor rhetoric, his social policies are regressive. He has pushed for raising the sales tax and extending it to include basic foods and medicines. And he has proposed a "user fee" for rural health centers that have historically been free. Introduction of this kind of cost-recovery "health reform package," formerly only imposed by the World Bank, has caused worsened health in a number of poor countries. This is documented in *Questioning the Solution*, by Werner and Sanders.

If Mexico wants to reduce the epidemic of crime, kidnappings and violence now wracking the country, it will not do so through investing in more police and military force. Rather, it will do so by working toward a socioeconomic balance which helps reduce poverty and despair by providing fair wages and fair distribution of land. It will do so by increasing the accessibility of health care and other services in a way that effectively reaches the most vulnerable. And it will do so by encouraging a participatory democratic process where the poor and disadvantaged gain an effective voice in the decisions that determine their lives and their deaths. This in turn will require an educational system that encourages critical analysis rather than

blind obedience, and deals more honestly with history.

But for the people of Mexico and of the poorer and weaker nations of the world to bring about such democratic transformation within today's top-heavy, market-driven world, the concerned and forward-looking people of the planet must mobilize a groundswell of awareness for change.

This is the goal of such groups as the International People's Health Council, the People's Health Movement, Health Counts, MedAct, and the International Forum on Globalization and other coalitions with which HealthWrights has links. We encourage all of you who want to work toward a fairer, more peaceful world, or who want to see an end to the rising incidence of violence, kidnappings, terrorism, and authoritarian

reactionism, to study the root causes of these symptoms of social injustice. And we encourage you to join the groundswell of concerned, humanitarian action to correct them.

The answers to violence and terrorism lie not in retaliation and punishment but in understanding and equity. Not in more soldiers but in more teachers. Not in hate but in love.

Now the Good News: New Homes and New Life for the PROJIMO Projects

While the long epic of the community health and rehabilitation initiatives based in Ajoja appears to come to an end, the activities of PROJIMO (Program of Rehabilitation Organized by Disabled Youth of Mexico) continue valiantly in their new locations. And in some ways they are stronger and having wider impact than ever.

The PROJIMO Community-Based Rehabilitation Program in Coyotitan

The P.R.O.J.I.M.O. Rehabilitation Program which began shifting its base of operations to the village of Coyotitan five years ago, has now fully completed the move and continues to grow and extend its outreach. Its more accessible location near the main coastal highway makes its services more easily available to the population up and down the coast.

Both the municipal government and the village of Coyotitan have cooperated in many ways in helping the program make the move. The government installed free of charge the electrical connections and water supply, and has recently provided funding and assistance to help the team build additional quarters for guests.

Relationships with the local village have been growing closer in a number of ways. The teachers from the primary school bring groups of school children to play in the new "Playground for all Children" (disabled and non-disabled) and to become familiar with the activities of the program. Last year an after-school activity was started in which a large group of children from the Primary School take part in the PROJIMO Crafts Shop. Here, under the skillful direction of Marielos (who is paraplegic and rides a

wheelchair, the children make toys for disabled children and to share with their younger brothers and sisters. In this way, some of the early stimulation activities (which are good not just for disabled but for all young children) reach a far wider range of families.

An increasing number of visitors from different countries, many working in different fields of disability, have been coming both to learn from PROJIMO and to share their skills and experience. This interchange has become a valuable way of spreading the self-



Village children learning how to make toys

help philosophy and village-based technologies of PROJIMO wider afield.

The Conversational Spanish Training Program,

led by Julio Peña (who is quadriplegic) is gaining momentum (please see the information sheet in this newsletter). This Spanish pro-



Julio teaching Spanish to Marcia.



Marielos gives children pointers on the wooden puzzles they are making.

gram provides disabled teachers who have limited use of their bodies a chance to actively earn a living. The program is attracting an increasing number of people who want both to learn Spanish and to volunteer in an innovative Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) program. Student volunteers have come from many lands, including the USA, Holland, Japan, and India.

Julio learned language teaching skills from Sarah Werner (David's cousin), who teaches ESL in Ohio. Julio is now teaching Rigo, also quadriplegic, the art of teaching language. Most of the teaching is one on one. Students have learned a lot and have generally been delighted with the experience.

Air conditioning

One of Julio's biggest challenges during summertime is surviving the heat. As a quadriplegic, he does not sweat below his neck, the site of his injury. To keep his body temperature from rising dangerously high, in the summer he must constantly spray himself with water and fan his body. It is like driving a car across a desert with the radiator nearly empty: Julio faces a constant battle to keep his body from burning up.

Fortunately, one of Julio's grateful language students, Marcia Thorndyke, has recently donated funds to install a simple air conditioner in Julio and Rigo's bedroom. In hot weather, that room can double as a classroom for Spanish lessons. This way, visiting students who are unaccustomed to sweltering

heat can have a more comfortable study environment. The high cost of electricity is a concern, but the team hopes that the income from the Spanish training will more than offset the cost of running an air conditioner. (In running a community-based program in a poor country, every centavo counts.)

Note: For those who want to know more about the PROJIMO CBR Program, we invite you to purchase our book "Nothing About Us Without Us," or to look at it on our website (www.healthwrights.org).

The PROJIMO Children's Wheelchair Making Program in Duranguito

When, in April 2002, the team of disabled workers and village youth running the PROJIMO Children's Wheelchair Shop in Ajoja finally decided to move to a safer and more accessible village near the coast, I (David Werner) was unhappy. For 37 years the village of Ajoja, in the foothills of the Sierra Madre, has been the base of the community health and disability programs that I have put my heart and soul into, and during the course of which I have grown a lot older and perhaps a little wiser.

But with the continued violence, kidnappings, and killings in Ajoja and the adjacent mountain area, and the increased isolation because of the area's dangerous reputation, since the turn of the year the team began to look for a safer more accessible location for the program. When the people of Duranguito, a very peaceful small village near the Pacific coast just an hour from Mazatlan, welcomed them to set up shop in their village and offered them buildings to live and work in, as well as donated land, they could not resist.

I personally resisted the move, since I have strong roots in Ajoja after four decades. However I must admit that the team made the right move, considering that the Ajoja massacre occurred a mere two weeks later.

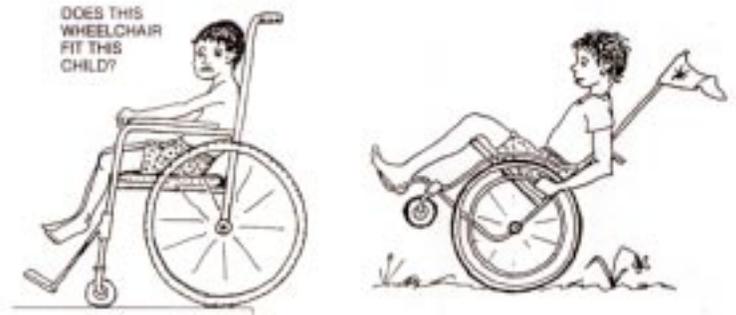
The good news is that in a surprisingly short time the new PROJIMO Children's Wheelchair program in Duranguito is up and running, with enthusiastic cooperation from the local village. The timing seems to be right, since there suddenly seems to be a growing interest in the PROJIMO made wheelchairs that are specially designed and adapted to the individual needs of each child.

Part of the growing interest in individually adapted (yet low cost) wheelchairs for children comes from the fact that in March, 2002, Gabriel Zepeda, coordinator of the

Children's Wheelchair Shop, gave a digital slide presentation to the 4th International Wheelchair Congress, hosted in Mexico City. He showed the way the team of disabled workers evaluated and measured each child, then proceed-

ed to design and build a wheelchair (or gurney or hand-powered tricycle) specially adapted to their needs and possibilities.

In response to this presentation, programs in many parts of Mexico and beyond have awakened to the right of disabled children to have mobility that make them more independent. They have discovered that through small, community-based workshops run by



disabled persons can caringly produce custom-made wheelchairs at low cost. Suddenly there is a flurry of interest in this empowering and enabling process.

Gabriel's team is now traveling as far as Nayarit and Jalisco to work with disabled groups that are beginning to provide individualized wheelchairs for disabled children, and currently the Duranguito team has a backlog of orders.



A child smiles hello from his new, custom chair.

Also, there is growing interest and support from different government programs in the state of Sinaloa. Thanks to Dolores Mesina, a wheelchair-riding graduate from PROJIMO who now works with the disability branch of the Integrated Family Development Program (DIF) in the Municipality of Mazatlan, that branch of government is cooperating closely with PROJIMO in providing wheelchairs and other assistive devices to special needs children.

Another exciting development is that the DIF at the state level is now eager to work with the PROJIMO wheelchair team in expanding the program to help meet children's needs throughout the state. Arrangements are currently being made for a group of disabled youth in the distant city of Los Mochas (in Northern Sinaloa) to apprentice in Duranguito for 2 or 3 months, in preparation

for setting up their own shop in Los Mochas. Stichting Liliane Fonds, a charitable organization in Holland, has for many years been providing generous assistance to help cover the cost of wheelchairs and other assistance for disabled children in difficult circumstances. More recently, the Rotary Club in Mazatlan has been raising funds to pay for wheelchairs for adults who can't afford them.

Thanks to the assistance of Liliane, Rotary, and DIF in helping poor families pay for the

wheelchairs, for the last 2 years the PROJIMO Wheelchair Program has been essentially self-sufficient.

Hearty thanks are also due to the Mulago Foundation for assistance to both PROJIMO programs in getting up and running. And we also wish to express our sincere thanks to Bread for the World for helping the PROJIMO Rehabilitation in Coyotitan meet the costs of providing assistance to low income families.

Help Needed

While the PROJIMO Children's Wheelchair Program is now virtually self-sufficient in terms of salaries and maintenance, the move from Ajoya to Duranguito has incurred substantial expenses. Land has been donated for building the permanent center. The construction expense will be considerable. Donations for building the new center are deeply appreciated. **Please help if you can.**

Dutch Volunteers Help Design a One-Hand-Drive Wheelchair

The conventional wheelchair works well for persons who have strength in both upper limbs. But for persons who have only one strong hand and the other paralyzed, propelling the wheelchair is not easy. Persons who are hemiplegic (paralyzed on one side) from brain injury or cerebral palsy fall into this category.

For a number of years, Martin Perez, an innovative wheel designer who used to work at PROJIMO, and who is himself paraplegic from a bullet wound, was working on an all-terrain one-hand-drive wheelchair design. (Commercial hemiplegic wheelchairs break down quickly on rough roads.) But Martin had to leave Ajoya before his design was fully completed.

In the summer of 2001, two industrial engineering students from Delft University in Holland did an internship in Ajoya, where they helped design 2 different models of hemiplegic wheelchairs. In one model, the

seat is placed low so that the person can use use his stronger leg (by pushing on the ground) to help propel and steer the chair.

The second model is the one-armed-drive wheelchair illustrated in Figure 1.

This "hemiplegic" or one-hand drive wheelchair is designed for the rider who has strength or control in only one hand. It has two hand-rims on the person's strong side. The inner rim drives the wheel on the side it is on. The outer rim drives the wheel on the far side.

Thus by pushing the inner rim, this young man makes a left turn. By pushing the outer rim, he turns to the right. By gripping and pushing both rims at once, he moves straight ahead (refer to Figure 2).

In the one-hand drive wheelchair, the outer hand-rim powers the wheel on the opposite site by means of a an axle which passes

through the center of the hub on the rim side, and is attached to the wheel on the far side. The axle is built so that it can be folded like an accordion, to facilitate transport and in other circumstances where a folding wheelchair is needed.

This wheelchair, designed by the Dutch engineering students at PROJIMO, is much more sturdy and trouble free than the commercial hemiplegic wheelchairs in the USA, which are good for hospital wards but quickly break down in sandy or rocky terrain.

This one-hand drive wheelchair, built by Gabriel's team for this girl with hemiplegic cerebral palsy (pictured in Figure 3), also has an easily adjustable angle to the back. A push button release on either side behind the backrest allows the angle of the back to be easily changed from upright to more horizontal. This allows her to change her position, from more upright for mobility and other activity, and more reclined for resting.



Figure 1 - The one-hand-drive wheelchair has handrims for both wheels on one side.



Figure 2 - This innovative wheelchair has a folding axle to transfer power from one hand rim to the far side.



Figure 3 - A young lady with hemiplegic cerebral palsy smiles at her new mode of transportation.

Announcing the “Politics of Health Knowledge Network”

A movement for health and social justice must go beyond “preaching to the choir”. If it is to help raise the awareness of the general public, and if its proposals are to be taken seriously by mainstream decision-makers, it is essential that the information it disseminates be objectively reported and rigorously documented. With this in mind, HealthWrights, in cooperation with the International People's Health Council (IPHC) and the People's Health Movement (PHM), is beginning to develop an interactive web site called the “Politics of Health Knowledge Network.”

The intent of this web site will be to supply those concerned with questions of health, development policy and social justice with an easily accessible resource of relevant information.

* The information will be carefully researched for accuracy, fully referenced, and presented in an objective (non-inflammatory) manner.

* It will cover a wide range of topics and sectors relevant to the achievement of Sustainable Health and Social Justice for All.

* The information will be presented in the form of summaries and extracts (with references to the full articles or sources), comparative data, charts, stories, and selected testimonials.

* It will draw on credible publications, but will include first hand accounts of people whose health and lives are most affected.

* It will cover everything from global policies to first-hand accounts of local events.

The information will be organized and presented in the form of a map designed to show the links or causal chains between different occurrences at different levels, from local to global. Users will be able to enter the Knowledge Network with anything from a personal health-related concern to an international health-related issue, and from that point be able to follow connections in many

directions. They will also be able to see how their particular issue or concern fits into the larger picture or global picture. They will also be able to see how policies and decisions in different sectors interact to have a far-reaching impact on health.

Every effort will also be made to link **analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of current policies and practices**, with examples of more positive, equitable, and sustainable alternatives. When a problem is cited, the

hope it does.

To assist in the development of the Knowledge Network, we are looking for people to play the following roles:

* **Representatives** of like-minded groups and organizations who can help with managing/co-coordinating the project

* **Volunteers** who can provide key information, data, and stories, either on the general theme on Politics of Health, or on specific focal areas

* **Intermediaries** who can help cull, summarize, and organize information, and arrange it into the format of the overall map

* **Programmers** who can help develop the interactive database

* **Communicators** who can help spread the word about the Network and recruit contributors and volunteers

* **Researchers** who can search the Internet and other sources for information on health, sustainable development, and social justice

* **Fundraisers**, with the

hope that we can pay a few key people to help put the Politics of Health Knowledge Network together and keep improving it

In summary, the main purpose of the Politics of Health Knowledge Network will be to **provide credibility** -- through solid, well-balanced analysis and comprehension of workable alternatives -- to those who are currently advocating for change, but who need easy access to clearly presented, well organized and convincing information. We hope that this Knowledge Network will be an important tool for change. But to get it off the ground we need help from people like you.



Artist's rendering of the front page of the Politics of Health Knowledge Network web site.

user will be able to click on a "positive action" button, which will give examples of proposed or already implemented solutions, with ideas or suggestions for action, and relevant resources or organizations. This emphasis on positive alternatives and action will, we hope, make this Knowledge Network a motivating rather than a dispiriting instrument.

You can participate!!

The Politics of Health Knowledge Network will be **interactive and participatory**. Indeed its growth, evolution and refinement - indeed, even its initial success -- will depend on input from a wide range of users and concerned volunteers. In this context, the overall "Movement for Health and Social Justice" could play an instrumental role in the development of this Politics of Health Knowledge Network - and we very much



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Armando, in Coyotitan, measures a boy for twister cables to help straighten his legs.

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This issue of *Newsletter from the Sierra Madre* was created by:
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Trude Bock - Proofreading

"My pacifism is an instinctive feeling that possesses me because the murder of people is disgusting. My attitude is not derived from any intellectual theory, but is based on my deepest antipathy to every kind of cruelty and hatred."

— Albert Einstein

Please Note!
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