

Paraguay's Health Auxiliaries

In 1977 two Paraguayan physicians, Ruben Mallorquin and Anibal Rolon, decided to use teacher volunteers as rural health aids. The IDRC gave assistance and arranged an advisory visit by the director of a similar program in India.

The teachers, who attended a two-week training course, spend their weekdays in the classroom, consult patients after school, and visit families assigned to them on weekends. They offer vaccinations, rudimentary health care and advice on such matters as sanitation. Some of the families can be reached only on foot, by horse or by horse-drawn cart. The 100 teachers in the program serve about 26,000 people.

An unexpected effect of the program is that one district health inspector is supervising the installation of six or seven times as many latrines as before.



Ivan Head

A Comment from Ivan Head

What is the prospect of the underdeveloped world, the southern half of the world, ever catching up in any real sense with the industrialized nations? Is this a realizable goal? Would the rise of the standards of life in the south mean a lowering of standards in the north? Ivan Head, IDRC president, comments below:

"If we're talking about the poorest of the poor achieving within the lives of people now living, say by the year 2000, a degree of dignity, of achieving better nutrition, better health care, better shelter, better education, then this can be done.

"For the first time since World War II, the people of the developing world have attained enough resources to start acquiring new things that they need. The first thing that any family leader wants is more food. When worldwide food consumption surpasses population growth, it means that on a per capita basis, the poor are becoming better off.

"In a modest fashion, the IDRC is contributing to the dignity of individuals in the developing countries. We do so in large measure by concentrating our efforts on the "essential needs": food, shelter, health, education. In the final analysis, however, the centre regards the essential need as the acquisition of competence on the part of the developing countries to identify and solve their own difficult problems. It's the responsibility of the developing countries to help themselves. The assistance that IDRC offers is in modest amounts, but in areas we think important, such as agriculture, such as shelter. We tend to concentrate on supporting research and, most importantly in my opinion, on supporting it in a way that will enhance the programs that are originated and continued in the developing countries themselves.

The most rudimentary form of preventative medicine is often the most effective. Here, a health auxiliary shows an Iranian mother how to wash a child.

