

Giving the poorest a chance

by JoAnn Lloyd

Psychology and Human Development Professor Patrice Engle moves with ease between the comforts of California and the challenges and joys of developing countries.

Past projects have taken her to Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Peru. Now she is experiencing life in India as UNICEF's chief of child development and nutrition.

Her nearly 30 years as teacher, researcher, and consultant helped prepare her for this daunting position. "After much soul-searching, I decided to give it a try," Engle says. "I was interested because the job dealt with my two loves — nutrition and child development."

What does a day in the life of the chief look like?

"UNICEF's role," she explains, "is to work with government to provide technical support, advice, and funding to improve the lives of poor people. There is tremendous concern for people's rights, particularly those of children.

"This means that UNICEF's programs are intended to combat discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, and class," says Engle. "They also attempt to reach the children and women who are the hardest to reach. And UNICEF is committed to community-based actions — those that help people improve themselves and build on their own strengths."

Engle's projects include one that gives poor adolescent girls, who are normally in arranged marriages before 18, a chance to make choices. Another provides support for community-based nutrition programs that locate malnourished children and help their families. Research on the effects of

vitamin A is under way, and Engle is also working with a program that is an Indian version of Head Start, costing about \$20 per child per year, compared to Head Start's approximately \$4,000 per child per year in the United States.

"A major challenge is raising the status of women — the ratio of women to men is dropping, with only 837 women to every 1,000 men in urban areas, due to female infanticide," Engle says.

"Every day there is lots to learn," says Engle. "This is a huge country and an exceedingly complex culture. What I most wish is that every Cal Poly student could have a week or two in one of these villages. It's an incredible learning experience." **CP**

