As we begin our first project with Playing for Change Foundation, we would like to share the inspiring story of how it started. The project begins in Tintale, a rural village in Nepal. We are helping to design and build a new school. It will be part of an art & education campus including high school classrooms, the Playing for Change music school, a performance space, community meeting room, vocational school and medical clinic. The technologies used will serve as examples of methods the surrounding community can use to improve their homes and environment. This is our first project with Playing for Change. If you don't know about them, take a look at our last newsletter http://groundwork.org/English/NewsLetters/GWNewsletter5_NewPartnerPFC.pdf.

This project has its roots in some amazing work done by William Aura (Regional Director, Playing For Change and founder of AISP®). Aura, as everyone calls him, traveled to Nepal about 15 years ago. While in Kathmandu he met an 11-year-old boy who wanted to practice his English. Aura soon found out the boy, Shyam, was not in school but in forced labor. Aura found a way to get Shyam in school. He gave him money for books, but he found that Shyam was not buying the books. He was borrowing his teacher’s book, and using the money to make multiple Xerox copies and sending them to his village. That got Aura curious about the village and Shyam invited him to visit. Aura brought some books and supplies to help other kids like Shyam continue their education.

Aura thought he had done his good deed and was done, but things snowballed. In helping with the school, he insisted that the materials he brought had to be available to everyone. Nepal has a caste system, so it meant that all castes had to attend. And so did girls, which was not usual. The kids got along well in school. To Aura’s surprise this became the seed of social change in the village. The school became the focus of surrounding villages. Families from other villages began sending their children to the school.

At first the school was outside under the trees and on the porch of an abandoned house. In 2006, Aura gathered some money and with volunteers from the village, built a two room school house. Then he returned to the U.S. One night
he got a call from Nepal, “We’ve got a problem.” “What is it?” “The community activists say the school is too small!” They said it should be for everyone and it wasn’t big enough for everyone. After putting in so much effort, Aura was told it wasn’t enough! This could make you laugh or maybe cry. But of course they were right. And Aura himself had emphasized that it should be open to everyone. Amazingly, Aura and the village managed to build a provisional structure with bamboo walls for 4 more classrooms. Everyone was pleased. That was ten years ago. Today the bamboo walls have been replaced with concrete block and the first two rooms now have two more rooms on the second floor with nicely plastered walls. The school has 160 students. Shyam, the 11-year-old, has graduated from college and become a leader in the village.

However, when kids graduate from the elementary school, they have to walk 2 hours each way to go to the closest high school. And the high school doesn’t have as good facilities as the elementary school. The village asked Aura to help them get a high school. And that’s where Groundwork came in. We are helping to design and build the high school. It will be more of an arts and education campus, including the music school, performance center, vocational school, community meeting rooms, and medical clinic (there are none close by now). We are building in a way that can serve as an example to the local community of ways they can improve their own homes and health. For example, houses need to be earthquake resistant. We might be able to raise funds to build a reinforced concrete building to U.S. building codes, but that would have no applicability for the villagers’ homes.
Instead we will use technologies that utilize local resources and that can be used by the local people. Similarly, the school will need to deal with issues of clean water, sanitation, smoke free kitchens and other factors. We will address each of these in a way that is practical for the surrounding villages.

Next Issue: More about the community and details of the project.

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1 Aura Import Sponsorship Project

Students in their school yard.