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**Latin American Cover Story**

## OPINION SHAPER: XOCHITL GALVEZ RUIZ (int'l edition)

The year was 1994. Mexican executives were leaping at business opportunities they thought would catapult them into the First World under the new North American Free Trade Agreement. But Xochitl Galvez Ruiz, an engineering consultant whose two-year-old High Tech Services firm was growing fast, was concerned. "I realized we were creating two Mexicos--one for people with dollars, and one in which people had nothing. The have-nots weren't going to progress at all if they didn't have proper nutrition," she recalls.

So Galvez took a small but important step. She created a group called Fundacion Porvenir, the Future Foundation, which distributes a food supplement to indigenous children suffering from advanced malnutrition. Her philosophy: that Latin America's private sector must help bridge the enormous gap between rich and poor. That need will grow even more crucial as governments face the prospect of an economic slowdown. "It's up to civil society to correct these inequalities," says the soft-spoken 35-year-old Galvez.

She knows first-hand how hard it is to move up from "third-class citizen." Galvez was one of seven children in a family of impoverished Otomi Indians in the central Mexican state of Hidalgo. She excelled at school and won an award for outstanding indigenous students. Her stipend covered bus fare to a distant high school.

Although there were no computers in her small town, Galvez decided to study computer science after seeing a pamphlet advertising the career. She earned an undergraduate degree in the subject and a master's degree in telecommunications at Mexico's national university while working as a telephone operator. In 1992, she took \$3,000 in savings and created her own consulting firm, High Tech Services, which designs communications and energy networks for office buildings. The first year, her firm billed about \$200,000. She was battered by the 1994 peso devaluation but quickly recovered. High Tech last year rang up sales of \$900,000 to clients such as

3M Co. and Mexican banks.

But her chief concern is the Future Foundation. Galvez says that last year she channeled all of High Tech's \$150,000 in net income into the foundation. She recruits students as volunteers to "adopt" Indian communities, visiting them once a month to distribute food supplements of powdered milk, sugar, cornmeal, and vegetable oil. The foundation has helped 100,000 children, but Galvez says that as many as 2 million indigenous children in isolated Mexican communities are so malnourished that they are "on the doorstep of death." Galvez's goal is to persuade all Mexican corporations to help reverse such a tragedy.

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