



OPPORTUNITY International

Transforming LIVES Newsletter No. 6

COLOMBIA



Atul Tandon, CEO of Opportunity International United States, visited Opportunity International Colombia between June 29 and 30. Atul, a native Indian, felt at home in Colombia, a country of surprising and contagious joy.

Getting to know our leaders WHEN LIFE IS SWEETENED

Atul visited Arles Mina in his sweets factory. As a teenager, Arles worked in the cocaine production process as a raspachin, a harvester who "scrapes" the coca leaves from the plant. On his own free will he abandoned this volatile job and emigrated to Bogotá, determined to transform his life. At first he walked the streets, buying and selling whatever he could, but when he had enough savings to start his own company, he got hold of a deep cauldron and several gallons of milk and got ready to reclaim a culinary tradition of his native Valle del Cauca. Today, Arles employs several young adults from his region who arrive at Bogotá looking for a better future; while Arles prepares the milk caramel, they set out to look for clients and markets.



THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE

A group of women surprised Atul with their solidarity and commitment. The members of the Monte de Horeb Trust Group, who range between 20 and 50 years, have many, many things in common: they are active and faithful, they like to save, and they sew for a living. These seamstresses of the Caracolí neighborhood, located in the periphery of Bogotá, joined to apply for a loan that has allowed them to buy textiles and manufacture school uniforms, work uniforms and other garments for massive use. Several suppliers currently buy the high-quality products of this group of entrepreneurs from Caracolí.



LEADERS IN MOVEMENT

WE ARE SUPPORTING YOU

Excerpts from Atul's words to OI Colombia's management team.



It is an honor to be here. There are two reasons for this, two reasons to rejoice. First, the Colombian peace process: as your brothers and sisters who have undergone the same ordeals, there are no words to describe what you have been through to arrive to this moment. I pray with you so that you reap the fruits of peace and the pain and anguish of war go away to be replaced by celebration and bliss. Rest assured that the people from Opportunity U.S. want to walk hand in hand with you throughout this process. And second, the greatness of a leader among us. A leader is not measured by what is done when he is present, but by what happens when he is not around. And Enrique is a great leader. He has believed in you and upon returning he can see that the Company has not only maintained but also strengthened itself.

In the U.S. we know that Opportunity is rooted in Colombia. We started our operations here. Our first client, Mr. Carlos Moreno, was Colombian, and from then on, for more than 45 years, we have tried to replicate his story. We are very committed to this country. Our goal, to support those who most need it, has remained unchanged. We will continue to walk by your side and try to help you day by day to become better at what you do.

If you and I keep on doing what we have done for the last 13 years, by 2030 there will not be a single human being on this Earth who lives on less than two dollars a day. Nobody was able to say this before. You and I are part of that group which can affirm it with certainty; we live in a special moment of human History. I would like to ask you to keep on walking with us during the next twenty years to reach this goal. This is what moves Opportunity, what moves me personally, and what I pray for.

I would like to thank you for who you are and what you do, and wish you all the best as you move on. And I say to my brother Enrique: "Neither balance sheets nor buildings make a bank. People do. And you have loved these people all these years; I see it in your eyes and in theirs. I pray so that this love lives on and I join you in that love".

"ONE MORE REASON TO BE HERE: THE SMILES OF THE CHILDREN MAKE ME HAPPY!"

On Saturday, June the 1st, Atul visited the social impact projects carried out by OI Colombia in the Girasoles neighborhood of Cartagena. He met with the women that we supported in the foundation of the Life and Education Association.

The leaders presented the contributions that the Association has made to the community it belongs to. They retold in detail how they built the educational center where several children, teenagers and adults are currently being educated.



Projects such as this one reflect OI Colombia's commitment with building a new country, of leaving the labyrinths of war behind in order to walk the roads of peace.



Atul imprinted his palm on the walls of the Girasoles school as a symbol of support for the place which fosters the children throughout their early years.



The children greeted Atul with a song about solidarity and an acrostic poem with the word "Gracias", "thank you".

