

Questions for Ernesto Zulliger (Founder of Porvenir Perú)



Tell us a bit about your background.

I was born on October 3, 1961, in Mexico-City, to Swiss parents. I spent the first 16 years of my life in Mexico, Ecuador and Chile. The reason why I switched countries so often was due to my father's job who worked for the Swiss company Nestlé. I then lived for 10 years in Switzerland, where I studied Economics and Finance. After finishing my studies, I worked for a Swiss bank during four years in Venezuela and then for three years in Uruguay. I am a financial advisor and have been working in the field for more than 28 years. Although I live in Switzerland since 1995, I still travel a lot to Latin America for professional reasons.

What were your reasons to create the aid organization Porvenir Peru?

Having lived for 23 years in five different countries of Latin America, I feel much identified with that region of the world. The poverty as well as the social and economic inequality that exist in these countries have always concerned me. After turning 50, I looked back on my life and I arrived at the conclusion that I should be grateful for having had a life without worries and needs so far. For me, this used to be something normal and natural. My profession as a financial advisor had not allowed me to notice, until turning 50, that in our lives there's not only a material and financial side, but also the "non-material" side, which is in the bottom of our hearts. Luckily, as the years go by, one becomes wiser and one sees things differently. One should not believe that living a life without worries and without needs is something normal. Overall when it is a sad reality that in this world there are many people who haven't been fortunate in their lives. During the last third of my life I want to do something humanely useful and support people who haven't been as fortunate in their lives as me. For this reason, I founded the Organization, so that it may also serve other helping people as a stepping stone, and that therefore we may help families who live in extreme poverty.

Why did you choose to make an Organization for Peru, a country where you have never lived before?
In 2012 I had the chance to visit the poor neighborhoods of Lima with a local charity organization. This had been the first time in my life that I walked through a poor neighborhood in a country in Latin America, and where I had the chance to speak with the population. Although I had lived for 23 years in the region and I was aware of the existence of poverty, never before had I had the chance to visit a poor neighborhood up close and talk to its inhabitants about their problems and needs. The emotional experience I went through motivated me to create an aid organization for Peru. Although I had never lived before in the country, I believe that the important thing in life is to help those in need, without making distinctions as regards nationalities or ethnic origins.

In what region are you developing the projects?

Initially, and after having visited the poor neighborhoods of Lima, I had the intention to create a foundation to provide humanitarian aid in those places. Nonetheless, I had to acknowledge that this would not make a big difference in the neighborhoods of the capital, a city with a population of 10 million, of which almost a million lives in poverty. For this reason, I decided to concentrate the efforts of the Organization in smaller and more manageable regions, where sustainable results may be seen with the modest resources currently at hand. The Organization supports overall the indigenous peoples of the Peruvian Andes, specifically in the region of Cusco, where many families still live in great poverty and do not receive any kind of support due to living in isolated areas of the country.

What's your knowledge about the indigenous population?

Before starting the Organization, I spent a few weeks in Peru visiting several indigenous communities in the Peruvian Andes that live in great poverty. Most of those communities are found at altitudes of 3500 and 4500 meters (11'500 - 14'800 feet) above sea level. In those Andean regions, the living conditions are extremely harsh for the families, who live almost isolated from the rest of the country and practically do not receive any type of assistance. Sadly, many of its settlers want to abandon their communities in order to live in the cities, expecting to find better living conditions there, especially for their children. But many times the opposite scenario occurs: indigenous people, who are not used to urban life, are exploited and used by people with greater social and economic power; as a result, they can hardly find a job that allows them to have a human existence. For this reason, many indigenous families that emigrated to the cities cannot send their children to schools because the parents do not have the necessary financial means to buy school supplies or pay for the daily ticket in public transportation. The consequences for children are negative ones, since afterwards they dedicate themselves to ask for handouts in the streets, or doing works like shining shoes and washing car windows, or even stealing. Sadly, there are also many daughters of indigenous parents that turn to prostitution to contribute in this manner to the improvement of family income. It is a sad reality that an indigenous person who is born poor will also die poor. The same thing will probably happen with their offspring. Porvenir Perú seeks to break this vicious cycle and provide some hope for indigenous families so that they may have a better life in their native places, away from the cities.

What kinds of projects does the Organization support?

Our main objective is to improve the living conditions of the indigenous families in their native places and thus stopping emigration from the countryside to the cities. Our aid programs can be summarized as follows:

- ✓ Professional and technical support in farming and livestock breeding to ensure alimentary self-sufficiency of the families. Ideally, achieving a surplus production which can be put up for sale.
- ✓ Ensuring clean water supply for families.
- ✓ Social aid program for women who suffer from abuse from men, or for mothers with children who have been abandoned by their partners, and thus need help for survival.
- ✓ Supporting educational programs in order to guarantee the primary education of children in the isolated indigenous areas where there are no public schools.
- ✓ Supporting of health programs, especially in the area of hygiene and birth control.
- ✓ Promoting and marketing of handcrafts and folklore music made by the indigenous peoples.
- ✓ Promoting awareness campaigns in Andean communities for ecological and environmental matters in order to guarantee sustainable environmental protection.

Who still forms part of the team?

Besides my daughter, Vanessa, who lives in Switzerland and supports the Organization in all social, educational and environmental matters, we also have Angle Callañaupa Alvarez as Project Coordinator. Angel is of indigenous origin and speaks the native language Quechua. His resume is very impressive and extensive, so I rather refer to his profile, which can be found on our website under "Our team". We are very proud to have Angel in our team, since he brings with him all the qualities, the experience and the knowledge necessary for carrying out our projects successfully at indigenous communities.

The second important person in our team in Peru, who supports our organization as a project counselor, is José Luis García Castro. He is a leading personality in the city of Cusco in the field of culture. José Luis speaks, besides Spanish, fluently the indigenous language Quechua. He supports our organization in the planning of new projects, especially in the field of education and culture. This includes the new theater group with participation of the indigenous children, which we are still evaluating.

One last question: what's your vision for Porvenir Peru?

My wish is that Porvenir Peru can serve as a platform for many other people who share our goals and principles, and that together we may achieve a shift of awareness in our society in favor of the people living in poverty. If all the people who have been blessed in their lives with wealth, happiness and success would not take their situation for granted, I believe that our society would have already taken a great step forward. But in order for this to happen, we must open up our minds and hearts a good deal more. Only our actions will create a positive and sustainable change in our society, not just words.