



## Extending Solar Oven Impact

Solar Oven Partners' (SOP) always knew that solar cooking could have a real impact on families in developing countries. After all, a woman who cooked in a solar oven instead of over a charcoal fire didn't have to spend limited money on charcoal, she could pasteurize drinking water, and the family needn't inhale unhealthy smoke.

We knew that women could earn extra income by selling baked goods that would be impossible to make over a charcoal or wood fire. What we never imagined was that a woman in the Dominican Republic would be earning extra pesos by using her solar oven to make handcrafted bars of soap!

Gregoria García runs her business, Gregali Soap, out of her home in Tenares, a town some 96 miles north of Santo Domingo. SOP In-Country Director Erasme Figaro heard about Gregoria during a follow-up check to Sosúa, where solar ovens had been distributed in 2016. That visit, says Erasme, "exceeded my expectations."

Not only was he pleased to see families using the ovens to cook, but he heard about Gregoria, who lives 2 ½ hours away from her sister's home in Sosúa.

Gregoria's organic herbal handmade soaps are plant-based. "The oven is for extracting juices from the plants," explains Erasme, who traveled to Tenares to meet this entrepreneur. "She brews organic coffee and puts the plants in the oven with the coffee to extract the juice. This extraction process takes her three days, but she saves on gas by using the oven."

That savings is significant for this home-based business. Gregoria told Erasme that she was previously spending \$1,000 pesos (equivalent to \$19 in U.S. dollars) on cooking gas for each three-day extraction. With the solar oven, that cost is eliminated. If she were to extract every day with the power of the sun, she would save approximately \$10,000 pesos each month.

*Continued on pg. 2*



*Gregoria Garcia in front of her handcrafted soaps, which are created using the solar oven*



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\*Check out web site: [solarovenpartnersumc.org](http://solarovenpartnersumc.org)  
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## Extending Solar Oven Impact (cont.)

“The minimum wage in the Dominican Republic varies by sector,” says SOP Director Marj Evans-de-Carpio, “but a monthly income based on the minimum wage ranges between \$6,000 and \$15,000 pesos (\$115 to \$286 in U.S. dollars). That’s a potential savings equal to 66 to 166% of minimum wage.

Gregoria told Erasme she primarily depends on direct sales from her home, although she does have a website, <https://gregali.negocio.site/>, a marketing tool that can eventually help broaden her consumer base.

In addition to being a living example of how a solar oven can improve a woman’s ability to make a living in a tough economic environment, she’s also helping spread another benefit of solar ovens. “I’ve given demonstrations,” she told Erasme, “including to the ex-minister of environmental affairs, Domingues Brito, showing how this oven can save many people by not polluting the environment. No smoke, no firewood.” Good news all around!



Gift-packaged Gregali Soap

## Crossing Language Barriers in a New Way

When American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter Jane Keller and teacher Rita Robinson met in a South Dakota classroom years ago, they never imagined that they would someday make happy connections in the Dominican Republic.

Jane acquired sign language naturally, helping colleagues at work and learning deaf culture. When she heard that Tulare, SD, had been looking for an interpreter for three years, she moved back to her home state and became certified in ASL.

Interpreting in the small community was Jane’s first interpreting job and it was there that she and Rita became friends.

Retired now from the K-12 education system, Jane currently interprets in a variety of community-based settings.

Her local church, Redfield UMC, enthusiastically supports Solar Oven Partners, so she had volunteered at the SOP manufacturing workshops in Raymond, SD, and Zeeland, ND, when an opportunity to go on a mission trip arose.

“I wanted to go for awhile, and I knew both Rita and another person who were going to the Dominican Republic in July, so,” says Jane, “the time was right.” Although she informed SOP Director Marj Evans-de-Carpio that she signed, she didn’t expect to put her ASL skills into action. She simply intended to build ovens.

On the team’s trip to a Dominican grocery store for cooking supplies, Jane decided to take advantage of in-store banking to exchange some money. Meanwhile, sharp-eyed Rita noticed several baggers talking in sign language. She called to Jane, “Come over here; you can talk to these guys!”

“Initially, I signed with our bagger, says Jane, “things like names, him asking me, ‘What are you doing?’ I told him about our mission trip. He thought this was great. The guy behind was signing too, and pretty soon a third bagger came over. It was a random conversation in a grocery store.”

Jane is no stranger to the opening of doors through signing. “God does use our gifts in unexpected ways,” she says. “Sign language breaks communication barriers down—not just for deaf persons but for hearing people, too.”



Jane Keller and a deaf Dominican grocery bagger converse. “His finger spelling was out-the-window!” she says. “He had Spanish as written language and I had English spelling so we depended on signs instead.”

# SOP: a Platform for Community Empowerment

Sometimes a ministry not only touches individuals, but can be a vehicle to help change entire communities. Solar Oven Partners (SOP) is in just such a position in the Dominican Republic. SOP is blessed to have the Rev. Erasme Figaro, SOP's In-Country Director in the Dominican Republic, also serve on the social action team for the Evangelical Church of the Dominican Republic (Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana). The team uses a holistic, education-based, Christ-centered approach aimed at transforming lives in local communities.

According to Erasme, one goal of the social action team is to ensure that people in a community feel that they—and not others—are responsible for changing their lives. “We must support people in their multiple needs,” Erasme explains, “but we must awaken their spirit of unity and empowerment to solve their own problems.”

In doing that, he says, the team must deal with the cultural impacts of colonialism that can often be a source of learned helplessness and conflict. “We must address social ills while helping society,” he insists.

Illustrating the long-lasting impact of colonialism, Erasme shares a fable about an eagle which, when very small, fell from his nest. A chicken farmer found the eagle,

brought him to his farm, and raised him among his chickens. The eagle grew up living like a chicken, and believed it was a chicken. One day, the story goes, the eagle sees a bird flying high above. He was impressed. “Who is that?” he asked the hens around him. “That’s the eagle, the king of the birds,” they tell him. “He belongs to the sky. We belong to the earth; we are just chickens.” So, the eagle lived and died as a chicken, for that’s what he thought he was.

## The power to change



In other words, explains Erasme, the imprint of colonization in Latin America passed through the people’s bodies into their minds. “We were divided and taught that power always comes from outside,” he says. “We believe we have no power to change our situations, and that is why we must depend on government and others.”

A recent mission trip brought home how Erasme believes SOP can help promote the concept of social unity and empowerment. In July, an SOP mission team was scheduled to conduct workshops and distribute ovens in La Merced, a poor village on the Dominican Republic’s southern shore. On the first day, many children showed up to see the ovens and watch the process, but few adults attended. Erasme offered to move the workshop to Saturday and Sunday in order to give the adults an opportunity to earn an oven, but again few adults showed up. He then decided to not distribute ovens.

“It’s not that these people didn’t need the ovens, but we didn’t believe that they would use it,” he says. “They showed no interest and did not arrive for the presentation.” In other words, they didn’t



*A girl from La Merced is excited to help bake a cake*

possess the underlying belief that it was in their power to change their circumstances. They did not see themselves as eagles.

The ovens represent more than just a means of cooking. “It’s a perfect platform to continue promoting social unity and community empowerment,” Erasme says. “More than just giving ovens away, we are trying to create an impact in people’s economic conditions, their health, and on our natural resources. We must do our best to find the people who are really going to use the ovens.”

Erasme adds that the social action team’s mission is to develop people’s capacity to identify their assets and resources and use them to find solutions to problems affecting their community. Members of the team understand, he says, that citizens must be the ones to make the critical decisions and carry out the actions that lead them along the path they define for their community. Through the program, lives and communities are transformed from the inside out, as people come to Christ and work together to address local needs.

Solar Oven Partners is honored to be part of this exciting and life-changing process!



*Rev. Erasme Figaro, pastor in the Evangelical Church in the Dominican Republic and In-Country Director of Solar Oven Partners.*

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*During a recent follow-up visit to an oven distribution, In-Country Director Erasme Figaro encountered this man preparing lunch in his solar oven.*

### *Opportunities to Give:*

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