Martin Solorzano could easily complain about his childhood in a remote mountain village of Mexico. Each day he had to wake at 4 a.m. to milk the cows before heading off to school and then returning home to work the fields, planting corn and seeds.

“I clearly remember the sad days, when it was difficult to get something decent to feed us, or when the rain ruined our little house made of wood, zinc and a dirt floor; when we did not have the resources to get notebooks or pencils or when Christmas arrived and we never received gifts.”

But Martin says, despite being poor, he was happy because he had a rich imagination. And what we imagined was being a doctor. He came to that decision at age 11, when a relative got seriously ill and died because she did not have the money to move to the nearest hospital 3 hours away.

“That day I promised myself that I would be the first doctor in my family and perhaps in the community.”

But that was a challenging road for a country boy in Mexico.

“Being indigenous and poor in Mexico are stigmata that mark you for life and predispose you to live a life full of discrimination and without opportunities; most of the time, we are condemned to repeat the cycle of poverty and marginalization of our parents.”

Martin was determined not to let his circumstances stand in his way. He worked hard on the farm and in school, eventually becoming the first in his family to earn a college degree. And then it was on to the big city, accompanied by his father, to take the exam for medical school.

“The first day I left my town to go to the big city, was one of the worst days I have ever lived; a culture shock I had never imagined.”

Half of their meager money was robbed by a taxi driver who noticed they were country people. They were left stranded with nowhere to sleep and not enough money to get back home. Fortunately, a good Samaritan stepped in and saved the day, giving them food, shelter, and bus fare home. But the best was yet to come.
“One week after, I saw my name in the newspaper saying I was accepted at the Medical School, and my new life was starting in that moment.”

Martin thrived in medical school and, in 2013, he was offered the opportunity to do a clinical year at one of the best hospitals in Mexico. It was a move that transformed his life. During that year, he competed and won a chance to visit the United Nations in New York as a youth delegate representing indigenous people.

“Here I finally found my vocation for social development because it opened my eyes to different ideas and cultures. I decided to take the banner of social development as my own and help my people through [my] experiences.”

Martin worked with both government offices and non-governmental organizations that are responsible for improving the quality of life of indigenous and vulnerable people. In 2015, with the support of the US-based non-profit The Resolutions Project, he created Building Health, a youth organization and program that works to provide free and accessible medical services and health education to indigenous peoples throughout the south of Mexico. In just two years, Building Health has helped nearly 3,000 people directly and 10,000 indirectly.

“I know from experience the hard process they face every day in order to [succeed], and the complicated life to which they are doomed. I firmly believe that the priority of every person who has succeeded is to help the most vulnerable to improve their quality of life in order that they have the same opportunities.”

Along with his work with Building Health, Martin practices medicine at rural centers throughout Mexico. He says his dream is to become a neurosurgeon, “the best neurosurgeon Mexico has ever had, and create a specific program for indigenous peoples where surgeries are accessible to everyone.”

It is the dream of a boy who climbed out of mountains of poverty to change his world. Imagine that.

Martín Solórzano grew up facing extreme poverty in his indigenous community in Mexico. Despite all odds, he was the first in his family and his community to become a doctor. Martin has dedicated his life to alleviating poverty and providing access to healthcare in indigenous communities in Mexico. He is also a fellow of The Resolution Project, founded in 2007 to develop and empower young leaders so they can pursue socially responsible solutions to issues affecting communities around the world.