

Keep Moving Forward

By Amreen Ali

The economic headwinds are strong in Latin America.

In July, the International Monetary Fund slashed its 2019 growth forecast for the region by more than half, from 1.4 percent to just 0.6 percent. Meanwhile, Brazil and Mexico—Latin America's largest economies—were not far from falling into a recession in the second quarter of 2019.

Despite the region's current trajectory, Colombia-based Grupo SURA believes it is well-positioned to ride out a potential recession, says Tatyana Orozco, chief administrative officer and vice president of corporate affairs for the \$6.2 billion financial services holding company.

Ms. Orozco, who worked as an economist for the national government before taking on her current role, had a front-row seat to her country's economic fragility during the 2008-2009 global recession. That experience taught her to keep a level head—and be proactive, not reactive.

With a downturn appearing more and more likely, here is how Ms. Orozco and the executive team at Grupo SURA are strategically growing the company's portfolio of investments:

1. Identifying opportunities in the recession. Ms. Orozco meets regularly with chief risk officers across the company to identify the challenges the company faces and new prospects that could come from them. "We constantly analyze our strategic risk exposure and the strategies to mitigate them," she says. "We're always looking at the trends that might be advantageous for us and the ones that can present risks."

For example, Ms. Orozco says she and the rest of the leadership team are currently looking to increase the company's offerings to small and medium enterprises by providing regulatory and financial management services that might help them better prepare for a recession. "We are looking at new ways to

approach what the customer needs and how we can help them grow," she says.

2. Pushing ahead on innovation. Internally, the group has an innovation team that identifies ways to grow the business while tackling arising challenges, like competition from fintech startups armed with disruptive technologies. "I think one of the most important risks that the industry has is all these tech companies coming around now," she says. In response, "we are creating new companies that are able to guarantee the sustainability of our investment portfolio."

These new investments include WeSura, a collaborative insurance platform that enables people to insure their assets by pooling risk among friends. Further, the company is investing in game-changing ideas through its SURA Ventures initiative (\$34 million over the last two years). One of its investments is San Francisco-based startup Zendrive, which tracks drivers through mobile sensor data in order to improve insurers' loss ratios.

3. Investing in people. Grupo SURA is uniting the talent pool across its companies into a single human resources system that each unit can access and use wherever needed. This ensures that its companies are relying on the right people, while also discovering value and opportunity that might have been hidden all along. "It will allow us to identify more possibilities for work that we can do together and to learn from each other," she says. "This is a service business, and human resources is a big part of it."



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