

HAITI 2017 Update

By *Caroline Wischmann*

WIL's trip to Haiti in 2012 was a truly inspiring experience, a first-hand exposure into the lives of the women being helped through our village banks. All who traveled there came away with a renewed understanding of our mission to empower women globally.

Haiti has not changed much in the last five years. All the tent people have been moved to the "burbs" so that the streets are no longer lined with the homeless. The crumbling government buildings have been razed and not replaced. But the sides of the roads are still piled high with garbage, interspersed with broken down cars, trucks and motorcycle parts and the streets are still lined with merchants selling their wares-containers of petrol, lottery tickets, bananas and mangos. Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere, has no clean air, no clean water, no sewage system, no infrastructure and no silence. The rhythm is one of controlled chaos with an African cadence of resigned patience and long suffering.

Fonkoze, the Micro Finance Institution WIL used to fund two village banks in Haiti, is a remarkable organization and was an honoree at our 2015 fundraising event. The Executive Director of Fonkoze USA, Leigh Carter, is retiring this year and ran her last Insight Trip in September. I wanted my husband David to experience the "Fonkoze Haiti" to better understand where my passion for empowering women comes from.

We visited the following groups:

1. Solidarity Center-Groups of 5 women already established in business
2. Ti Kredi (Little Credit)- Individual women being trained & mentored
3. CLM- Poorest of the poor-provided with basic living needs; do not need to pay back loan
4. Boutik Sante (Community Health Store)- local women trained to bring health products, services & health education to the rural areas

Despite the bleakness of their lives, the Haitian people are positive and pleasant. They appear accepting of their fate and shrug off their desperation with hard work. Their lives are a matter of chance. They are hopeful but not optimistic. What they want is an opportunity to move forward so that their children can lead better lives. Fonkoze and WIL provide that bridge to a better future, in small steps, with humanity and compassion. I feel so proud that I can be a part of bringing them hope.